

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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NICK AND JED: THE KING TRAPPERS OF THE BORDER.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



By the time the savage discovered his presence, Hotchkiss had the heavy barrel of his rifle raised above his head. The first note of his yell was silenced by the descent of the gun.

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Jan 10-1936

CHAPTER I.

THE HUNTER AND THE MINGO.

When the war of the Revolution had closed and the independence of the colonies was established the population of the country began to increase with wonderful rapidity. Emigrants came on every ship that touched our shores, and towns and cities sprang up as if by magic. Forests crumbled away that fields of waving grain might take their place, and rivers were dammed that mills might receive the benefit of their wasted powers.

As the emigrants came in many families who had been reared near the coast removed further west and became the pioneers of the new civilization that was destined to make this country the mightiest republic the world had ever seen.

Thus it was that the old settlers began to move over the Alleghanies into that vast fertile region now known as Ohio. They found the soil rich and productive, the forests teeming with game of every description, and the rivers alive with fish.

But they also found an enemy to dispute with them the possession of the land. That enemy was the American Indian, and he was disposed to dispute every inch of ground with the palefaces, whose treatment of his people nearer the coast had not been such as to win their love and respect.

One day in the year 1790 a man in a hunter's garb was seen sitting on a fallen tree on the right bank of the Muskingum. His face was bronzed from long exposure to wind and weather, though there was a kindly expression about it that was calculated to win confidence when anyone was at all disposed to have confidence in man. He was of athletic mold and seemed to be in the very prime of his life—about forty years of age.

Across his knees lay his rifle, an old flintlock which he had carried many years, and which he seemed to regard with all the affection all hunters are said to have for their favorite weapons. It was a long-barreled piece, and quite heavy, and was held to the stock by means of fine deer sinews, wrapped around it in a manner that did not interfere with the aim. The stock had been broken off against an Indian's head. The head was also badly broken at the same time.

This man was sitting on the log looking out over the river, as if half expecting to see someone he was looking for. A deer came down to the water's edge to drink, within easy

range of his rifle, but the hunter eyed him without any apparent desire to shed his blood. Then a huge black bear came along within ten paces of where he sat, with the same result. The bear caught sight of him, sniffed the air, as if the smell of the white man was anything but pleasant, and then shambled away through the bushes.

The hunter was not hunting that kind of game that day. He was waiting for another hunter whom he had agreed to meet at that spot.

Hours passed, and still he sat there on the fallen tree gazing out over the river, with a patience that told how well qualified he was to follow the life he was leading. The sun passed the meridian and began to go down toward the western horizon.

The hunter glanced up at the sun and muttered:

"Them redskins is out an' Nick ain't hyer. They hev got 'im, an' that's why he ain't come. He ain't the man ter go back on his word, 'cause he's true grit every time, Nick is. Them Mingoos is worse'n pizen, an' Nick hates 'em like rattlers. Ef they've got 'im they'll roast 'im as sure as the sun shines. Drat 'em! They orter be roasted, the blasted yaller curs!"

The hunter, having delivered himself of his thoughts, relapsed into a profound silence again, and gazed out over the river as if half dreaming of his boyhood days. Suddenly he heard a whizzing sound, followed by a spat close behind him.

Turning his head, he saw an arrow sticking in the tree only a few feet behind him. It was buried an inch in the wood, and was still quivering from the force of the blow.

One glance revealed the situation to the hunter.

He had been shot at by an Indian, and the arrow had missed its aim but a few inches.

The hunter did not waste any time looking around to see whence the arrow came. He knew that other arrows could come from the same source. To remove himself from the position of a target, he slid down off the log like a turtle does when disturbed, and crouched behind it as quietly as a mouse.

"Thar ain't many of 'em," he muttered, as he crouched behind the log, "or more arrows would hev come, an' a yellin' like all possessed. Howsomever, I'll wait an' see ef thar's more on 'em. Ef I don't fool 'em, my name is not Jed Hotchkiss."

From where he lay he could see the arrow sticking in the tree, and could see the direction whence it came.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, in an undertone, as he looked up at the arrow. "That arrow came over the river, an' ther cussed redskin as sent it is er waitin' ter send another. I'll make 'im so sick he won't keep his color—he'll fade away ter ther happy huntin'-ground, whar no palefaces will ever trouble him ergin."

The hunter took his coonskin cap and placed it on the muzzle of his rifle. Then he slowly raised it above the log, as if he was raising his head cautiously, to take a peep around for his enemy.

Whiz! came another arrow, and went clear through the cap. Instantly the cap went down and two hands were raised above the log clutching wildly at space, as if in a death agony, and then fell back again.

The next moment a yell of triumph came from a solitary redskin on the other side of the river.

Jed Hotchkiss chuckled at the success of his trick, and muttered:

"That dratted son of a wolf will come over for my scalp an' won't git it. I'm waitin' for 'im."

Ten minutes later he heard sounds that he was waiting for—sounds that indicated one swimming in the water.

Springing to his feet, he beheld a Mingo warrior two-thirds the way over in the water, swimming boldly toward him.

The redskin was almost paralyzed with amazement on seeing his intended victim alive, with rifle in hand, waiting for him.

"Ugh!" grunted the Mingo, coming to a sudden halt, "pale-face heap 'live!"

"Yes," said Hotchkiss, in a very quiet tone of voice, "I ain't half as dead as you are. Yer can't git no scalps hyer," and he leveled his rifle at the Mingo's head.

The redskin was at a disadvantage in the water. His only hope was in diving repeatedly, and thus disconcert the aim of the hunter. So he gave forth a wild whoop that rang out far and wide over the river and forest, and then dived under the water.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the hunter, "that's to warn ther others, but he can't save his bacon that way. Injuns can't live under water like mudcats. They ain't that kind of fish. They hev got ter breathe an'—thar he comes up for his wind—I'll make 'im go down agin just for fun! Ha, ha, ha, redskin! Any fish down thar! Bring me up a trout, an' I'll let you off——"

"Ugh!" grunted the redman, making another dive to avoid the expected bullet from the hunter's rifle.

Hotchkiss kept his rifle aimed at the Indian's head whenever it appeared above the surface of the water, which kept him constantly diving for several minutes.

At last the desperate savage turned and began a series of dives toward the other shore, hoping to get into the woods, and thus make his escape from his wily foe. But Hotchkiss was not the man to let him get away so easily.

"Come back, redskin," he called, "or yer'll git some lead ter eat for yer supper."

"Ugh! me go away," grunted the savage, diving again.

"Ye're pretty good at divin'," said Hotchkiss, as he kept his eye on the water, "but yer can't come that 'ere game on me. Just when yer think ye're safe, I'll be thar ter make yer sick, sure."

The Indian reached the further bank of the river and started to dart into the bushes, when the keen, whip-like crack of the hunter's rifle rang out, and a bullet crashed through his brain.

He reeled forward, clutched the air and fell prone to the earth.

CHAPTER II.

THE RESCUE FROM THE STAKE.

When the savage fell to the earth, the hunter stood on the opposite bank of the river and gazed silently across the water, as if to see whether or not his shot had done its work.

One, two, three minutes passed, and the form of the savage lay motionless in death.

"I reckon the blasted redskin has shot his last arrow," muttered the hunter, going back to the log on which he was sitting when the Indian sent the arrow whizzing past his head.

Another hour passed, during which nothing more occurred to disturb his meditations. The birds twittered above his head, and wild game came to the river to quench their thirst; but of these he took no notice.

As the time passed, he gave frequent anxious glances at the declining sun. The slanting shadows of the tall sycamores began to reach the opposite bank of the river, a fact which became patent to the hunter, and aroused him to action. As if moved to a sudden impulse, he clenched his brawny hand and brought it down upon his knee with a force that would have felled an ox.

"Blast their red picters," he said, "they've got him! Nick ain't the man ter go back on his word. He said he would meet me yer, and here I am, and here I will stay till that ar sun goes down, and then if he don't turn up I'll know the redskins hev got him."

Having delivered himself thus, he settled back on the log with a dogged determination to wait until the sun went down.

Another hour passed, and while the sun was yet an hour high he saw a band of Mingo warriors coming down the river in their birch canoes. From where he was sitting he knew he could be seen; hence he made a spring for a clump of bushes, near the water's edge, into which he threw himself on his face. From here he could view the savages without fear of being seen. There were seven canoes, in each of which were five warriors, one of whom, in the canoe nearest the opposite bank, caught sight of the dead Indian lying where he had fallen, near the water's edge.

A whoop brought the others to a round turn, and all the canoes pulled for the shore, while the savages disembarked and gathered around the dead body.

From where he lay the hunter could plainly see all that had transpired. He saw them examine the wound that killed him, and then followed a close inspection of his arrows, bow, quiver, scalping-knife and tomahawk.

From the fact that he was slain by a bullet, they intuitively knew that a white man had fired it.

Jed Hotchkiss was too well versed in the characteristics of the red man not to understand the meaning of the wild chorus of yells that followed the wild savages' inspection of their dead comrade's effects.

Yell followed yell till the echoes were awakened far and wide.

"That means they want somebody's scalp," muttered Jed in his place of concealment, "but ef they git mine they've got to fight for it, and when I fight somebody will get hurt. Why, bless my everlasting eyes! they have got a white man in one of them 'ere canoes."

He saw a half dozen warriors run down to one of the canoes and drag a white man from it, who was bound hand and foot. Catching sight of the man's face, he almost sprang to his feet in amazement.

"Good Lord!" he gasped, "that's Nick—they've got him! Now they are mad enough to burn him because of that dead skunk at their feet. There's nigh on to two-score of 'em, but

if they build a fire around Nick Nelson I'll spill enough Indian blood on it to put it out. Thar! he's looking over here! I'll tell him I'm waitin'," and with that he gave the bush a vigorous shake as a signal to his friend that he was near at hand.

The distance was too great for Hotchkiss to perceive what effect his signal had on the prisoner. That the signal had been seen and understood by Nelson, Hotchkiss was fully convinced. He was also convinced that the savages intended to camp for the night where they were, as their preparations to do so were plainly understood by the hunter.

As the sun went down the light of a big campfire illumined the forests and the placid bosom of the river.

"That's good," chuckled Hotchkiss. "I won't have to go huntin' round for 'em. As soon as it is dark I'll go over thar and see what they're goin' to do with him. Mebbe they'd like to have me keep company with him and be one of a big roast, but we'll see—we'll see."

As the night advanced, dark clouds obscured the sky and shut out the light of the stars. Taking advantage of the favorable opportunity, Hotchkiss made his way down the stream a distance of a quarter of a mile.

Holding his powder-horn and rifle above his head, he entered the river and waded cautiously out as far as the depth would permit. Then, by a few bold strokes, he swam silently across to the other side, where he landed, without having wetted a grain of his powder.

Waiting long enough for the water to cease dripping from his garments, he began creeping cautiously toward the campfire, glimpses of which guided him in the right direction.

Creeping on hands and knees, he got near enough the campfire to take in the situation.

The Mingoes were excited to a pitch of savage frenzy over the dead warrior, and were holding a council to determine the fate of the prisoner in their hands. That he was not the slayer they well knew, but, being a white man, they thirsted for his blood, and the blood of any paleface, however innocent he might be, would go far in the gratification of their thirst for vengeance.

Lying flat on the ground in a clump of bushes, Jed Hotchkiss heard the Mingoes decide on the fate of Nick Nelson.

They decided to burn him.

As soon as the decision was rendered, the warriors made torches at the campfire with which to search fagots from the woods. They bound him to a sapling, and began piling fagots around him, but so slow were they in gathering a sufficient amount, that the entire band, with the exception of one, proceeded to scour the woods for all the dry fagots necessary for their purpose.

"Great b'ars!" exclaimed Jed Hotchkiss, as he saw only one warrior standing by the side of the prisoner. "Now is my time," and, springing to his feet, he dashed forward with the speed of a deer, and reached the side of Nick Nelson ere the savage dreamed of the presence of danger.

By the time the savage discovered his presence, Hotchkiss had the heavy barrel of his rifle raised above his head. The first note of his yell was silenced by the descent of the gun-barrel on his unprotected skull. He dropped like a log, and gave up the ghost without a groan. Then, drawing his knife, Hotchkiss quickly severed the thongs that bound Nelson to the stake, and in five seconds he was a free man.

But the next moment some of the savages, returning with their arms full of fagots, discovered the situation. A wild yell awoke all the echoes of the forest, and every savage threw down his fagots and rushed for the campfire.

"Cut for it, Nick!" said Jed. "We will meet whar we agreed to."

"I'll be thar," said Nick, as he dashed away into the forest, with Jed close at his heels.

In a flash they were out of sight in the dense darkness of a starless night.

To follow them was worse than useless, as no trail could be seen in that intense darkness. In their baffled rage the savages gathered around the campfire and yelled themselves hoarse, whilst the two fugitives made their way up the river without meeting each other till they had gone a couple of miles. Then when they exchanged signals they found themselves within a hundred yards of each other.

"Nick!"

"Jed!" and the two friends made their way together to a point where they could cross the river, and thus get out of the way of the Mingoes during the night.

On the other side of the river they sought shelter under an immense sycamore tree from the storm that was brewing.

"This rain will wipe out our trail, Jed," said Nick Nelson, as the big drops of rain came pattering down on the leaves.

"Yes; an' I ain't sorry for it," replied Jed, covering the powder in the pan of his rifle.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAIDEN'S ESCAPE—HUNTERS AT BAY.

By and by the rain came down in torrents, and our two heroes stood like statues under the big sycamore.

They well knew that in the rain and darkness the Indians would make no attempt to follow them, and they also knew that the rain would obliterate their trail so utterly that the best trailer among them could never find it.

"How did they catch you, Nick?" Jed Hotchkiss asked, as they stood there under the tree.

"Run me down," was the reply. "They war too many for me."

"Did you knock any of 'em over?"

"Yes; I reckon they ain't so many by five."

"Good! Them pesky varmints is more nor pizen. Ef they git ter Willard's Settlement afore we do, thar'll be awful mean work done thar."

"Yes; we orter been thar ter-night," said Nick, "but we hev done our best. The Willard folks are hard fighters."

"So they are. Ef we get thar afore ther reds do we'll make it awful hot for 'em."

"We must start at daylight in ther mornin'."

"Yes."

Then they relapsed into a conversation in which the reader can have no interest. They had agreed to meet there on the banks of the Muskingum that morning, in order to go to the assistance of a small band of settlers down the river at a place called Willard's Settlement. The Indians had plotted to attack the place and destroy the men, and carry off the women and children.

Jed Hotchkiss had become possessed of the secret, and had resolved to go to their assistance in company with Nick Nelson, another pioneer of that section.

Jed had arrived at rendezvous—as the reader has seen—and spent the day waiting for his friend. But Nick had been captured, as we have seen, and was a prisoner when he arrived in the vicinity of the appointed place of meeting.

They took turns at sleeping, and thus, through the night, managed to get sleep enough. When morning came they partook of a piece of venison which Hotchkiss had in his possession, and then began their march.

The stars had not all faded away when they started. They were very anxious to reach the settlement that evening, and did not waste any time on the way in the early hours of the day.

Nick Nelson had lost his weapons when he was captured, and had no chance to get them again when he made his escape. There was, therefore, but one rifle between them. But Hotchkiss gave him the brace of pistols he wore in his belt, and thus enabled him to have something with which to defend himself in case of a sudden attack by the Indians.

It was about noon when they reached a spring where both whites and reds were in the habit of stopping when in the vicinity. They found the spring in the possession of a party of Mingoes, who were resting and eating their noonday meal. The two hunters shrank back into the bushes out of all danger of being seen, and proceeded to make their way round the spring, and thus get away without being seen.

"If they see our trail," whispered Nick, "they'll run us all day."

"Yes, but they ain't going our way this time," said Jed.

"No;" and the two trudged along through the forest, keeping well into the bushes, so as to leave as little trail as possible.

An hour later they heard yells in the direction of the spring, and halted to listen.

The distance was nearly two miles, yet they could distinctly hear the chorus of yells that came from many throats.

"By gum!" exclaimed Jed, "thar's trouble back thar, sure."

"Well, we don't hear no shots, so thar ain't no whites in it," was Nick's reply. "Let 'em fight among themselves as much as they want to. I'd like ter hold their hosses till they was all scalped, drat 'em!"

"So would I, Nick. Hark! They are coming this way!"

Both men were alive to every danger that beset them, and when they heard the yells of the reds grow more and more distinct, they began to prepare for a desperate defense.

Louder and louder came the yells, and above the din came the sound of a horse's hoofs.

Hotchkiss and Nelson shrank back into the bushes and waited for the onset, for they fully believed their trail had been discovered.

But they were mistaken.

A horse dashed by, and a young white girl on his bare back was urging him forward at the top of his speed. Her hair streamed in the wind straight from her head, at the risk of catching some envious limb, and her eyes stared as if she was fleeing from grim death itself.

Just as she flew past the clump of bushes in which the two hunters were concealed, a shower of arrows whizzed past her head. Some of them pierced her clothing and went through her streaming tresses. But she looked neither to the right nor left, keeping straight on in the headlong flight. In another moment she was out of sight.

"Nick," said Jed, "we'll fight 'em and give her a chance."

"Yes, fight ther whole tribe!" responded Nick, drawing the two old flintlock pistols, and making ready to engage in a death struggle with the red fiends.

On came the Mingoes, yelling like so many demons, shooting arrows at every step at the flying maiden. When they came near the clump of bushes the two hunters gave them three shots. Three reds tumbled over in the grass, and the others halted in dumfounded amazement. Another moment, however, and they sprang for cover, fearing an ambushade from the unknown enemy.

"Load quick!" whispered Jed to Nelson, as he proceeded to reload his rifle. Nick was as quick as he was, and in a little over two minutes all three weapons were ready for another volley.

Whiz—whiz! whirr—zip! came a shower of arrows into the clump of bushes, and one of them passed through Hotchkiss' coonskin cap, grazing his head.

"Give 'em another volley, Nick," whispered Jed; and, taking deliberate aim, they fired, killing two and wounding one.

The savages were wild over the affair, and made the welkin ring with their yells. But Jed and Nick reloaded their weapons and resolved to hold them in check till the young girl could get away from her relentless pursuers.

Crack! crack! crack! went the rifle and two pistols again, and by that time the Indians had become convinced that only three white men were in the bushes.

They made a rush for the spot, over a score of them, and then the two hunters broke and cut for the woods.

The reds saw only two men run out. They thought the other had been killed, and made a rush to get his scalp. That momentary diversion enabled the two hunters to get a good start.

"Cut for it, Nick!" cried Jed, as he made tremendous strides through the woods.

"If we separate we'll meet at Willard's," said Nick, running at full speed.

"Keep together! We may hev ter fight agin!" cried Jed.

Seeing the two men flying before them, the savages gave up all idea of catching the young girl, who had made her escape from them, and resolved on the capture of the hunters. They made the welkin ring with their yells, and the pursuit grew hot and swift.

After running about five miles, the two hunters entered a swamp and pressed forward to the deepest recesses of it.

"Now we can have a show, Nick," said Jed. "Ef they follow us in hyer, we kin take 'em one by one."

"But they won't do that, Jed," Nick replied, wiping his brow. "They'll try to starve us out."

Thinking they now had the two hunters at bay, the Mingoes surrounded the swamp and sent warriors in to run them out.

Two warriors came suddenly on them and were shot dead ere they could make any resistance. Nick possessed himself of a tomahawk and scalping-knife, and was more than ever prepared for a desperate fight.

Two more warriors were shot down a few moments later, and then the Mingoes were convinced that it would be cheaper to starve them out than to capture them by storm. So they withdrew from the swamp and planted sentinels all round it to prevent their escape. Runners were sent out to get more warriors, and thus make sure the capture of the two palefaces.

In the meantime Jed and Nick waited patiently for night to come on and give them its protection.

When night came they began to make their way to the edge of the swamp. Sentinels were posted all around it, and bright fires blazed at points of fifty paces, so that a complete circle of light enveloped them. They saw how completely hemmed in they were, and began to grow desperate. Hunger stared them in the face.

"We must break through 'em and cut for the darkness of the woods, Nick," said Jed, after making a close inspection of the circle of sentinels.

It was agreed on, and soon after they crept forward, shot down the two sentinels and dashed forward.

But the next moment they were both seized by half a score of warriors and borne to the earth.

CHAPTER IV.

NICK AND JED ESCAPE FROM THE STAKE.

The struggle was short.

In the end the two hunters were made prisoners.

Not a redskin made any attempt to injure them, as they had made up their minds to take them alive to burn at the stake.

The moment they found that they had succeeded in making a capture, the redskins made the welkin ring with triumphant yells.

"Oh, yer needn't make sich a fuss over it, ye wolf whelps!"

cried Jed, determined to not let them do all the crowing. "We've knocked over four of yer yaller skunks in ther swamp thar."

"Yes," said Nick, "it takes a dozen redskins ter catch one white man. The Mingoos are all skunks. They can't fight."

"Ugh! Paleface talk brave now," said one of the reds in pretty good English. "The fire will make him cry like papoose."

"The Mingoos don't know how to burn a white man. He is a coward, and is afraid to go near enough to the fagots to make 'em burn."

"Wait till the fire burns," said the savage, with a shake of his head, as the two prisoners were being bound.

"Oh, yes—we kin wait. We ain't afraid of all ther Injuns in ther world. Bring on yer fire an' see how a white man loves ther heat. Pshaw! Redskins don't know nothing."

"Paleface heap big liar," said the savage, smarting under the taunts of the two hunters.

Nick was convenient to resent the insults, and so he raised his foot and gave him a kick in the stomach that shut him up like a jack-knife and sent him rolling in the dust.

The other warriors laughed at their comrade's mishap, which so enraged him that he rose to his feet and drew his tomahawk and rushed at him, as if he intended to kill him on the spot.

But Nick had no notion of being cut down like a dog. He sprang several feet upwards and planted both feet in the redskin's stomach. Down he went, with all the breath kicked out of him, and he lay like one who had been struck by a thunderbolt. He was the sickest Indian ever seen, and the other warriors only laughed at him for his pains.

Then the chief ordered the warriors to march the prisoners back to the spring, from which place the young white maiden had made her escape from them.

When they reached the spring they found that two more white women were there as prisoners. When the women discovered that the young girl had succeeded in making her escape they could not contain themselves for joy. They believed she would cause the white settlers to come to their rescue.

But they were horrified when they were told that the two white men who had just been brought in were to be burnt at the stake that night. The two hunters had killed a dozen warriors, and for that they must die.

The band took up the march down the river toward the village to which they belonged, and kept it up till night overtook them.

It was on the right bank of the Muskingum that they encamped that night. The place was well adapted for a camp. The river rolled by in front of a clearing, back of which was the great forest that stretched away toward the great lakes. On the lower side of the clearing was a spring of clear, cold water. Fuel was plentiful in the forest, and grass was abundant for the few horses in the band.

Soon after the campfire was lighted a yell from the river was heard. It was answered by a similar one from the shore. A few minutes later seven birch canoes ran up against the bank.

"They are ther ones who had me last night," said Nick, turning to Jed, who was tied to a sapling within a few feet of him.

"Ugh! Paleface no talk!" said one of the warriors who was duly assigned to guard duty of them.

"I will talk as much as I please, yaller belly," said Nick.

The guard saw that Nick's foot was still untied, and so did not go near enough to get a kick from it.

In a few minutes the newcomers found out that the prisoner who had escaped them on the night before had been recaptured. They howled their delight, and gathered around the

two hunters to get a good look at them. They readily surmised that Jed was the daring man who had aided him to escape, and therefore took a great deal of interest in him.

An hour later a council was held to decide on the fate of the two prisoners. The council was unusually unanimous in favor of burning them at the stake then and there.

Preparations for the dread event were made at once, and the captive women became faint with fear. Nick and Jed knew just what was coming, but they were not the men to show any signs of fear, or ask any favor of the redskins.

"It looks bad for us, Jed," remarked Nick, as he saw one of the reds mixing the black paint which they always put on the faces of those that were to be burnt at the stake.

"Yes; so it does, Nick," answered Jed; "but then we kin stand it, I reckon."

"Oh, yes; but I don't like ter. It's agin natur', yer know."

"Yes, I know; but these hyer redskins don't know nothin' about natur', the onery cusses! I'd just like ter git loose from this hyer cussed stake one minit. I'd show 'em a better way ter die, so quick it 'ud make ther heads swim."

"So would I, Jed; but we can't git loose, I reckon. This is about the tightest place I ever was in, an' I reckon it's the end of us."

"I ain't dead yit," said Jed, with a low, savage earnestness that showed he still cherished a determination to make one more effort for life and liberty.

Nick saw him straining at the thongs that bound his hands to the sapling behind him. The example was not lost on him. He made the same effort, and discovered that he could almost pull his right hand through. With the loss of some skin, he was sure he could free it, and instantly resolved to do so as soon as a good chance offered. His feet were also bound—a fact that gave him no little uneasiness; for he could not stoop to untie his feet without attracting the attention of the reds, who were now so busy in their preparations for the burning that they took no notice of the prisoners at the stakes. He resolved to free his hands and still hold them in the position they were when tied, in order to deceive the reds. This he did, skinning his hands badly in doing so.

"Courage, Jed!" he whispered. "My hands are free."

"Git away, then," replied Jed. "Don't wait for me. Save them at Willard's. I can't git loose."

One of the savages approached Nick to daub his face with the hideous black paint he had mixed of pine-soot and wet clay. He wore his tomahawk and scalping-knife in his belt. Nick's eyes fastened on them, and, when he put the first daub of paint on the prisoners' face, the savage felt his tomahawk and knife slip out of his belt. The next moment his throat was cut from ear to ear, and he sank down to earth at the feet of his intended victim.

Quick as a flash Nick stooped and cut the thongs that bound his feet, and in a moment they were free as his hands.

"Now cut for it, Nick!" whispered Jed. "Don't stop for me."

Nick Nelson was not the man to do such a thing. He sprang forward and cut Jed loose.

An Indian saw him and gave the alarm.

Instantly a chorus of yells awoke all the echoes of the forest and river, and the entire band rushed forward.

"Cut for it, Jed!" cried Nick, darting away into the forest.

Jed sprang away in another direction, thus dividing the pursuit, if any were to be made, and in a moment both were out of sight.

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE FIGHT IN MIDSTREAM.

When Nick dashed into the woods he ran into the midst of the horses belonging to the band. The animals reared and

plunged as if in a terrible fright, and the thought occurred to the hunter that if he could capture a fleet horse and get over the river with him, he could make quicker time to Willard's Settlement, and warn them of the impending danger.

No sooner had the idea occurred to him than he proceeded to put it into execution. To cut one loose and spring on his back was the work of a single moment. Then away he dashed toward the river, crashing through a dozen dusky warriors, several of whom were sent rolling in the dust.

"Come on, yer coppery varmints!" cried Nick, now assured that he could escape. "I want ter be roasted! Whoop!"

With appalling yells the savages dashed after him.

The river bank was but a few paces distant, and in a moment or two the hunter and the horse were in the water, swimming for the other side.

A shower of arrows whizzed about him, but in the excitement of the moment they flew wide of the mark and left him untouched.

The chief of the band gave a wild whoop, and sprang upon another horse, which he urged forward into the water. The faithful animal responded to the orders of the fiery chief and went in quick pursuit of the other one. Under the clear starlight the retreating figures could be seen halfway across the stream.

Nick Nelson looked back and saw that a solitary horseman was following him.

"I'll git that horse for Jed," he muttered to himself, turning right about and facing the savage.

They met in midstream.

"Ugh!" grunted the chief. "Paleface come back!"

"Yes; I want yer scalp," replied Nick, holding the scalping-knife in his right hand, which was bleeding from the skinning he received when he drew it through the thong at the stake.

"Ugh! me take scalp and burn paleface at stake," retorted the chief, as he seized hold of the horse's mane and aimed a blow at him with his tomahawk.

Nick threw up his left hand and caught the chief by the wrist and tried to get at him with the scalping-knife. The wily savage squirmed so as to escape with a slight wound on the shoulder.

But he gave a yell that caused a dozen other Indians to plunge boldly into the stream and swim to his assistance.

The hunter saw them coming, and knew that if they succeeded in getting to him it would be all up with him.

With a desperate resolution he stood up on his horse's back and sprang upon the chief, who tried to escape by rolling from his horse into the water. But the trick did not save him. Nick landed squarely on top of him and plunged the knife to the hilt in his heart.

Then, with a yell of triumph, Nick scrambled upon the back of his horse again and turned his head toward the further bank.

The dead chief sank to the bottom of the river, to rise again a few minutes later, and float with the current. But Nick did not stop to encounter the others. He urged his horse forward, and by the time he reached the bank the swimming reds were but little over two-thirds over.

When he struck the shore he gave another yell and dashed away like the wind. The horse was a good runner, and the bath seemed to have a good effect on him. Just beyond the timber that skirted the banks of the river was a stretch of open prairie that gave him a free course for miles.

"Now do your best, my good horse!" cried Nick, and the horse went like a thunderbolt over the prairie.

In the meantime Jed had made his way through the woods in the direction he and Nick were going when they were attacked by the reds, thanking his good fortune that the darkness prevented pursuit.

But he well knew that his trail would be followed early in

the morning by a strong party. So he did not wait to get the benefit of the daylight, but pushed on as fast as he could under the circumstances.

Just before daylight he heard moans in the bushes on his right, as if from one in pain or distress.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Someun's hurt about hyer!"

He crept cautiously forward, and found a young white girl lying on the ground groaning piteously.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, save me!" cried the girl. "I am half killed, and——"

"Why, how did yer come hyer?" Jed asked, stepping forward on hearing her voice.

"I was making my escape from the Indians, who had captured our family, when the horse I was riding ran under a limb with me. I was swept off and fell to the ground, but don't know how long ago it was. Oh, I wish I could die!"

"Don't say that, miss," said Jed, "for I will do all I kin ter git yer outen hyer. Kin you walk?"

"I don't know," and she made an attempt to rise. Jed aided her, and found that she was really very weak and ill from the effects of the fall.

"Yer ain't very heavy," he said, as he lifted her in his arms. "I kin carry yer all day," and he started off with her.

"Oh, you can't escape yourself if you try to carry me," she said, as she laid her head on his shoulder.

"Don't worry about me, dear," said he. "Jed Hotchkiss won't never leave a gal behind for the reds ter kill. That's me."

She seemed to think him equal to anything, as she resigned herself to his care without another word.

About a mile further on he came to a small brook.

"Water! Give me water," said the maiden, as she caught sight of the stream.

"Yes; as much as yer want," and he laid her on the carpet of leaves and brought her some of the water in an improvised leaf cup.

She drank it, and felt greatly revived. In a few minutes she was able to walk, and insisted on being allowed to do so.

Just as they started they were startled at hearing the snorting of a horse. The hunter had not a weapon of any kind with which to defend himself in case of attack.

"Oh, heaven, save us!" the trembling girl prayed.

Jed looked around in search of a stone, or anything else with which to make a defense. In doing so he caught sight of the horse. A second glance showed him that the horse was riderless. The girl also saw him and cried out:

"Oh, that's the horse I was riding yesterday!"

"Then it's good luck," said Jed. "We must catch 'im."

The horse made no attempt to get away from them, and in a few minutes the girl was on his back again.

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNEQUAL STRUGGLE—TWO TO ONE.

Having been relieved by the horse, Jed now pushed on through the forest, leaving the girl to guide the animal in his tracks. Mile after mile was passed, and the maiden began to regain her spirits. She told him the story of the killing of her father by the Indians, and the capture of her mother, aunt and herself.

Jed then told her how he and Nick Nelson had turned back the savages who were in pursuit of her the day before.

She was astonished.

"I remember hearing rifle-shots," she said, "but was too

much frightened to know what it meant. Oh, I am so glad you and your friend got away from them!"

"Yes, so am I," he said; "but we ain't safe till we git ter Willard's Settlement."

"Why, that's where we were all going!" she exclaimed.

"An' that's whar Nick an' me was goin'," he said, "an' we'll git thar afore night ef we don't meet no more redskins."

"Oh, I hope we won't meet any, as you have no weapons," and the young girl was never more sincere in her life in any hope or wish. But the words had scarcely died from her lips when two unearthly yells startled them. Two redskins darted out from behind two trees and rushed upon Jed.

The girl screamed.

But the hunter stood as still as a statue, as if he did not intend to make any resistance at all. The savages halted, and one said:

"Ugh! Paleface heap coward—no fight."

"No, I don't fight; I am the red man's friend," was the quiet reply.

"Paleface big liar."

"My red brother has a crooked tongue. He can see that I have no arms."

One of the warriors took charge of the horse and the other one caught Jed by the arm.

"Oh, my God!" she exclaimed, not understanding Jed's tactics, "why can't I die and be at rest?"

Just then she heard a dull crash, and looking toward Jed, saw that he had snatched the Mingo's tomahawk and buried it in his skull. The red man sank to the earth, quivering in the agonies of death.

The other savage made the discovery at the same time, and sprang at the hunter as a furious tiger would, and a terrible hand-to-hand struggle ensued.

The young girl again uttered a piercing scream. But Jed paid no attention to her. The savage was his game for the moment, and to him he gave his time.

The Indian was a brave fighter, and did not give way an inch; but in skill he was no match for the hunter.

Round and round they went, the red receiving terrible cuts every now and then, till he was covered with blood from head to foot.

"Yer ain't much on a fight, redskin," said Jed, as he gave him another cut.

"Paleface heap talk," was the reply, as the savage made another pass at him.

"Ha! ha! ha!—yes. My talk cuts Injun all up!"

"Me take scalp!"

"Oh, don't!"

"Ugh!"

Jed made a sudden pass at him and severed the muscles of his right arm. The hand fell to his side and refused to obey the savage's will.

"That's enough," said Jed, seeing that the red was now perfectly helpless. "Go away an' save yer scalp. I don't want it."

The redskin, however, drew his tomahawk with his left hand and rushed forward again.

Jed caught him by the wrist, wrenched it from his hand, and split his head with it.

The savage sank down on the leaves at the feet of his victor, and his spirit hastened through space to the happy hunting-ground of his people.

"Oh, you have conquered!" cried the young girl, almost beside herself with joy. "Are you hurt?"

"No—didn't get a scratch," was his reply. "Come on; we must git away from hyer."

He took the tomahawks and scalping-knives of the two dead savages, and led the way again through the forest.

He was now armed with tomahawk and scalping-knife, and

was the equal of any two Indians in a hand-to-hand struggle. But he missed his rifle and pistols. With them he never feared a score of redskins.

Just as night was coming on he came in sight of the blockhouse at Willard's Settlement, and made a rush to get there ere any prowling redskin could give him any trouble.

"Thank God, we are saved!" cried the young girl, as she saw several men, armed to the teeth, coming to meet them.

"Why, Jed Hotchkiss!" cried one of the men, running up to shake hands with the hunter. "Nick Nelson is getting up a party to go in search of you!"

"Nick is hyer then?"

"Yes—reached here at noon."

"Glad on it. Hyer's a gal who got away from ther Injuns," and he assisted her to the ground as he spoke.

Several women came forward and welcomed the young girl.

Old Ben Willard took her by the hand and looked at her. She was so pale and haggard-looking that he could scarcely recognize her.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, when he did make out her identity, "is this Nora Munroe?"

"Yes," she faintly replied.

"Where is your father?"

"Dead!" she gasped.

"And your mother?"

"She and aunt are captives."

The old pioneer turned pale for a minute or two, and hastily brushed a tear from his bronzed cheek.

"He shall be avenged!" he said, in low tones, and all who heard him knew that he was not speaking without a purpose.

Nora was led into the nearest cabin by one of the women, and given food and drink. She was half famished and revived greatly after satisfying her hunger.

"Jed—Jed!" cried Nick Nelson, rushing forward and grasping his hand, "we meet agin!"

"Yes, an' unhurt. I found ther gal we saw runnin' from ther reds, an' fetched her through, Nick," and the two heroes wrung each other's hands, whilst tears stood in the eyes of those standing around them.

Suddenly Jed turned to old Ben Willard and said:

"Yer must all sleep in ther blockhouse to-night. The reds are on my trail, an' 'll be hyer soon. They ain't far behind."

"To the blockhouse!" cried the old pioneer, and in ten minutes every woman and child was safely within the strong structure, where all the provisions of the settlers were.

The men then devoted themselves to the task of moving all the household effects from the various cabins to the blockhouse. By the time that was done, a young man caught sight of a solitary Indian in the edge of the timber. The savage made no attempt to conceal himself, but continued to advance toward the whites.

Ben Willard asked him:

"Why does the red man come to his white brother now?"

"Because he would eat salt with him and smoke the pipe of peace," was the reply.

Old Ben glared at him suspiciously, and said:

"Your people are making war on the whites. The red man's tongue is crooked. We will not eat salt with him."

"The white man is not wise. The red man wants to bury the hatchet, and live at peace with him. I have spoken."

Just then Jed Hotchkiss came up and recognized the Indian as one of the party who was trying to burn him and Nick at the stake the night before. He looked the savage in the eyes, and said:

"Yer tried to roast me last night, yer cantankerous skunk!"

"Ugh!" grunted the savage, who saw that he was recognized.

"Ugh!" grunted Jed, in mocking tones, "an' now yer want to smoke an' eat salt, eh? Take that and smoke it!" and with

his glass he looked at the red man's face.

that he dealt him a blow between the eyes that laid him out at full length on the ground.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SIEGE OF THE BLOCKHOUSE.

As the Mingo warrior measured his length on the ground, a chorus of savage yells came from the timber beyond the prairie, followed by a shower of arrows. They fell all around the whites, one of whom received a slight flesh-wound.

"Now for the blockhouse," cried old Willard, and the party made a rush back within the inclosure.

Just as the last one passed within, another shower of arrows came, every one of which found a lodgment in the logs of the blockhouse.

"Now give them some lead!" said old Ben; "but don't fire till you see your man."

The savages kept well within the shadow of the timber, evidently waiting for the shadow of darkness to protect them.

The stars were already beginning to appear, and the knowing ones in the blockhouse knew they were on the verge of a terrible night siege.

"Go down and bring up pails of water," said old Ben Willard, "for they will shoot burning arrows on the roof."

Several seized pails and descended to the well beneath the blockhouse, where they filled them with water. As not a shot had yet been fired by the whites, the savages became bolder and began to make cautious approaches. Suddenly a sheet of fire flashed from the portholes of the blockhouse, and five of the red demons bit the dust.

A chorus of yells followed, and the entire band made a rush with the insane intent of carrying the place by storm.

The sentinels fired fast and with deadly aim, and in less time than is taken to record it, a dozen red men were down.

It was too much for even the stoical Mingo, and they retreated again to the timber.

"That was good work, boys," said old Ben. "They won't try that ruse again to-night. We'll have the fire-arrows next. Some of you go up and empty the pails on the roof before they come."

A dozen pails of water were dashed over the roof ere a single burning arrow came to reveal the presence of the water-throwers. A few minutes after the last pail had been emptied, a ball of fire somewhat like a rocket ascended from the timber, leaving a stream of sparks in its wake, and descended on the roof of the blockhouse.

Another and another came, until nearly a dozen burning arrows were sticking to the roof, the boards of which, being well wetted, failed to ignite.

Some of the women became uneasy, fearing they would be burned up in the building.

"We are in no danger," said old Ben. "Just keep quiet and go to sleep, if you can."

Of course they could not sleep under the circumstances, and all through the long night they were faithful watchers by the side of the men.

When the last of the burning arrows had gone out, another dozen pails of water were thrown over the roof. Again another shower of burning arrows came, and with the same result.

The besiegers became disgusted, and shot hundreds of arrows at the blockhouse in the hope that some of them would penetrate a porthole and inflict damage, until the four sides of the house were stuck full of them.

Discouraged by their failure to make an impression, they resorted to a stratagem by which they hoped to frighten the

garrison into surrender. They built a large fire in the edge of the timber, but beyond the range of the rifles. Then they began marching around it in a circle, so that one-half of their number was hidden in the woods, whilst the other was exposed to view.

By this means they expected that, when they had marched ten times around the fire, each warrior would have been counted ten times by the trembling palefaces in the blockhouse.

Of course the old pioneers saw through the trick, and merely laughed at it. They had seen it played too often to be deceived by it.

"They take us for greenhorns," chuckled old Ben Willard, "but will soon find out their mistake."

"How many are there?" Nick Nelson asked.

"I don't know," was the reply, "as we can't tell how many times they've marched round the fire. It is not a very large band, though, or they would not have resorted to that trick to make us believe they had a thousand warriors."

"Let Nick and me go out and see how many there are," suggested Jed Hotchkiss.

"Can you do it, Jed?" old Ben asked, in a whisper.

"Sartin," was the emphatic reply.

"Then go ahead."

Nick and Jed cautiously descended to the ground floor of the blockhouse, whence they passed out through the narrow opening in the rear.

As all the savages had gathered around the fire in the edge of the timber, the two daring hunters made their way to the forest without being seen. Then together they crept cautiously around to the north side, where, by the aid of the light of the fire, they managed to count the strength of the enemy, which proved to be about fifty strong. There were about a dozen others helpless from wounds.

They were now holding a council, at which it was resolved to demand a surrender of the blockhouse, thinking they had impressed the whites by their overwhelming show of strength.

Nick and Jed chuckled in their sleeves at the shallowness of the trick, and hastened back to inform the garrison of the exact strength of the redskins.

A little after daylight a warrior appeared and demanded a talk with the palefaces. Nick and Jed went out to talk with him.

"What do you want, redskin?" Jed asked, as he approached him.

"The red man wants the palefaces to go away," replied the warrior. "The Mingo warriors will not harm them if they give up the blockhouse and take their women and children away with them. Our warriors are as many as the leaves of the forest."

"Look here, redskin," said Nick; "there lie a dozen of you warriors dead on the ground, and as many more lie wounded there by your fire, while none of our people are hurt. We have a well of water under our blockhouse, and meat enough to last a year, by which time we can kill every redskin in the world, if they come fooling around us. You haven't got but fifty warriors, none of whom know any more about fighting than a papoose."

"The paleface's tongue is crooked," said the Mingo, somewhat surprised at the knowledge the white man had of their numbers.

"You know I speak the truth, redskin," replied the hunter; "and right here I'll give you a bit of advice, which you will do well to heed. The Great Spirit moves the world, and all the people in it are His Children. The whites have as much right to live here as the red man, and we have come here to stay. If the red man will leave us alone we will be his friend, and live in peace with him; but if he will not, and continues to make war upon us, the palefaces will come as many as the

leaves of the forest, or as the raindrops when the storm sweeps over the land, and wipe him from the face of the earth. We have done you no harm. Why, then, should you seek to drive us away?"

The savage made no reply, but turned on his heel and walked moodily back to his companions, whilst Nick and Jed returned to the blockhouse to report the result of the interview.

Day came on apace and the Mingo kept well within the timber out of the range of the rifles. Not an arrow did they fire during all the forenoon, but later in the day they made the welkin ring with their shouts.

"They have received reinforcements," remarked old Ben, who was never at a loss to understand the meaning of their hideous yells; "but it makes no difference how many they have. Without cannon they cannot batter down these logs."

The savages had received an addition of over a hundred warriors, and were consequently jubilant. They marched boldly out into the clearing to make a display of their strength.

"Shake a white rag at them," said Ben, "and let them think we are ready to surrender. When they rush forward we can lay out a score of them, which will make them sick enough to let us alone."

One of the pioneers ran his arm through a porthole and waved a white cloth. A yell of triumph went up from a hundred and fifty savage throats, and a rush was made for the blockhouse.

"Now let 'em have it, boys!" cried the old pioneer, and a score of death-dealing rifles sent as many leaden messengers into their ranks.

Never were savages so utterly astonished. They halted and stood rooted to the spot as though utterly unable to comprehend what had happened.

"Give them another one!" cried old Ben.

They heard his voice, and realized that surrender was very far from the thoughts of the old pioneer. They gave another yell, sent a shower of arrows at the blockhouse, and then rushed forward with their tomahawks, with the savage determination to chop their way in.

In another minute more than a hundred tomahawks were hacking away at the logs, whilst savage yells sounded as though pandemonium had broken loose. But above the din, the cracks of rifle and pistol were heard, and at every shot an Indian went down in death. For in that surging mass a blind man could not have missed his aim.

"Be quick and sure, boys!" cried old Ben; "the longer they stay, the better for us."

They followed his command to the letter. An old hunter can load and fire his rifle fast. Hence, in ten minutes as many as ten rounds had been fired. By that time the chief of the band had discovered that nearly half his men had been killed or wounded. He ordered a retreat, and his followers fled to the timber as fast as their heels could carry them.

Too utterly demoralized to even think of shooting another arrow, they kept on in their flight till their yells died away in the distance.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

"They are gone for good, now!" cried old Ben Willard, as he listened to the yells of the retreating savages dying away in the great forest. "They have gotten enough, and will not trouble us any more."

"Hip—hip—hurrah!" cried one of the young men, who had fought bravely all through the siege.

The men, women and children took up the cheer, and made

the roof of the blockhouse fairly shake. Then they went pouring out to their cabins once more.

The men gathered up the weapons of the dead warriors and stored them in the blockhouse, and then buried the dead.

When the sun went down the only evidence that remained of the battle were the arrows, which stuck all over the blockhouse until it looked as though bristles had grown out of the logs. The settlers concluded to let them remain there to remind the Indians of their defeat.

That night the men, women and children slept without any fear of being disturbed by the red demons.

But the young men, who had heard the story of Nora Munroe, had resolved to go in search of her mother and aunt.

Nora was almost heartbroken over her lonely condition. All the relatives she had in the world were now captives in the hands of the Indians.

"Never mind, dear," said Jed Hotchkiss. "I'll never trap another beaver till I see yer an' yer mother kiss each other."

"Oh, Mr. Hotchkiss!" she cried, "if you go I know I shall see her again. You bear a charmed life. They cannot kill you."

"I am not so sure of that, child," said Jed, shaking his head. "They are mighty dangerous to fool with."

"But you go through all sorts of dangers without getting hurt," she said.

"But I may git scalped, or be roasted at ther stake yit."

"Never! Such a brave man will never be slain by such wretches. I feel it deep down in my soul."

"Ef I thought that I'd never let up on ther pesky varmints," replied the hunter. "But when they come too thick I hev ter cut for it."

"And that's right, Jed," put in old Ben Willard. "Never take any chances against common sense."

"That's good sense," said Nick Nelson.

"An' it's my rule," added Jed.

The next morning ten young men accompanied Jed and Nick Nelson in search of the party that had Mrs. Munroe and her sister in charge. The two hunters now had good rifles in place of those that had been lost, and they felt happy once more.

The party made straight for one of the Mingo villages, about one hundred miles west of Willard's Settlement. Nick had been there, and knew where it was. He was quite sure the captives had been carried there.

The first day they were out they met ten Mingo braves, who were out in quest of game. The savages were amazed at seeing such a number of well-armed whites out together.

"Hello, redskins!" cried Jed, as he came upon them. "How is the game ter-day?"

"Ugh! Where palefaces going?" the young chief of the hunting party asked.

"We are hunting the bear an' deer," replied Jed. "Have yer seen any deer ter-day?"

"The paleface's tongue is crooked," said the young chief. "He is on the warpath."

"The young chief is a fool. Ef we were on the warpath we would take his scalp instead of talking with him."

"The paleface lies. He cannot take the red man's scalp," and the young chief gave him a look of defiance.

"Does the young chief want to fight the palefaces?" Jed asked, seeing that if he did not show a bold front they would conclude that he and his comrades were cowards.

"Ugh! yes—Injun fight paleface," was the bold reply, and the hot-headed young chief drew his tomahawk and gave a warwhoop.

His warriors followed his example, and the battle commenced. But it lasted just one minute.

The whites raised their rifles and shot them down at the first volley. Not one was left standing on his feet.

"That's ther way ter serve the pesky varmints!" exclaimed Nick, as he quickly proceeded to reload his rifle. "If they want war let 'em have it."

The party then moved on, and left the dead lying where they had fallen. They had no time to bury the dead out in the wilderness—particularly when the dead were Indians.

When night overtook them they encamped on the banks of a small stream and proceeded to put out a strong guard to prevent surprise during the night.

Just after they had finished their supper they were astonished at seeing a tall, majestic-looking Indian, unarmed and with a blanket thrown over his shoulders, march past the sentinels and approach the fire.

"Hello, redskin!" cried Nick, staring at the newcomer; "who are you, an' what do yer want?"

The Indian gave him a stare that seemed to have an expression of contempt in it, and made a reply in a jargon which was all Dutch to Nick and his companions.

"That's all Greek to me, Mr. Redskin," remarked Nick. "Who are yer, anyhow?"

The same unintelligible jargon was used, and as it was not like anything the whites had ever heard before, they stared at each other in no little surprise.

"Are you a Mingo?" one of the party asked.

The reply of the savage was as clear as mud to the pioneers, but the haughty demeanor of the red man was what puzzled them more than anything else. They could not understand why he came into their camp unarmed and alone, with an air of superiority about him.

Jed understood pretty well all the tongue of the Mingoes, and tried to make himself understood in that language, but the Indian seemed to be all at sea as to his meaning.

"Give him a pipe of tobacco," suggested one of the whites, "and see if he will smoke it."

The pipe was given him. He took it in his left hand, looked curiously at it for a moment or two, smelled it, and then returned it with an expression of disgust in his face.

"Great b'ars!" exclaimed Nick. "He's ther first redskin I ever saw refuse a pipe of tobacco!"

"Guess he has strayed away from home an' don't know the way back," remarked one of the party.

"But the Mingoes would know something about him, or else have his scalp," said another.

The Indian turned suddenly on his heel and faced the last speaker, as if insulted by the remark, and made a rapid speech in that unmeaning jargon of his.

Then, as if regarding them as unworthy of his presence, he proudly threw his blanket about him and strode away in the darkness, leaving the astonished whites gazing after him, and wondering what the meaning of his strange conduct was.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERIOUS LEADER.

When the strange savage had left the little camp, the whites began to discuss the import of his visit.

"It means something," said Nick, shaking his head. "I saw in his eyes that he knew what we said about him. He may be a pesky Mingo, who came to see an' hear. They'll be down on us before morning, an' we'll hev a hot time of it."

"By gum, Nick!" said Jed, "I believe ye're right."

"So do I," responded Nick.

"Then we must move away from hyer, an' sleep in ther bushes without any campfire."

Nick looked at the hunter as if not fully catching his meaning. Then a moment later he said:

"Yes, we must move."

They made preparations to move at once. Ten minutes later they were silently marching through the woods in the direction they had been going during the day. Nick and Jed led the way, and the others followed in single file, stepping in each other's tracks as nearly as possible.

But after awhile Nick made the discovery that he was not leading the party—that he was following someone else just in front of him. At first he thought Jed had stepped forward. But a few minutes later he heard Jed's voice immediately behind him. Then he nudged the man in front and asked:

"Who is it?"

Instead of making a reply, the man stepped forward a few paces and was out of sight. They could not see but a few feet distant under the dark shadow of the trees.

Nick suddenly halted, and Jed asked:

"What's up, Nick?"

"Somebody is in front of me," was the reply.

"Who is it?"

"I don't know."

"Whar is he?" and Jed stepped forward. "Whar is he? I don't see anybody."

"He vanished when I nudged him and asked who he was," replied Nick. "Has any of you been in front of me since we left camp to-night?"

"No," came from every man in the party.

"That's very strange," said Nick. "Somebody has been leading me for a half hour, an' I thought he was Jed till Jed spoke behind me just-now."

"Which way are we going?" one of the party asked.

No one knew. The foliage of the trees was so dense overhead that only now and then could a star be seen.

"Did yer follow his lead?" Jed asked, after a pause.

"Yes. I thought you had stepped in front of me."

"Then it was a trick. Let's turn ter the left, an' keep straight ahead, an' look out for the leader agin."

Nick turned in the direction indicated, and the others followed in silence, wondering who the strange leader was that had been leading them.

Suddenly Nick discovered a man in front of him again, and sprang upon him. He was shaken off and sent to the earth so quickly that he didn't know just how it happened.

"What's the matter?" Jed asked, as he heard Nick fall.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Nick, "I believe it's the devil himself!"

"What is?"

"That man in front of me."

"Did yer see 'im agin?"

"Yes, an' I grabbed 'im. He shook me off as ef I was a child."

"By gum! I want ter git my hands on 'im just once!" and Jed Hotchkiss placed himself in front of the party. "Let any of yer git in front of me."

Jed drew his hunting-knife and started to lead them. Nick took his place behind him and waited for developments.

When a couple of miles were passed Jed thought he saw a moving figure in front of him. He crept up close to him and tried to get some idea as to who he was. To his surprise, he found him to be the tall savage who had visited their camp in the early part of the evening.

That discovery puzzled him beyond measure, and he walked quietly along in the Indian's rear, trying to think what to do under the circumstances. He finally concluded to test the Indian's motives, if possible, and find out his game.

He turned to the right and led off in that direction.

In a minute or two the tall form of the savage was in front of him again.

Then he turned to the left, and soon after found him still in the lead.

It was then very evident that the savage was not trying to lead them into any trap, as he did not try to lead them in any particular direction. He seemed willing to go anywhere so long as he was leading. Jed became convinced that the tall savage was a lunatic, and stopped to confer with his comrades.

"Thar he is," he said, as he came to a halt.

"Where?"

"Just ahead, thar. I know who he is, now?"

"Who is he?" a half dozen asked at once.

"That tall Injun who caused us ter leave camp ter-night." They were amazed.

They were also indignant.

"Kill him!" hissed several.

"Give 'im yer knife in the back!"

"Split his wizen!"

"No," said Jed. "He has been leadin' us a whole hour an' goin' nowhar in pertickler. I turned to ther right, an' he turned, too. Then I went t'other way, an' so did he. He ain't right in his head, I reckon. No sane Injun would go about with no weapons in his hands as he does."

"By gum, that's so!" said Nick. "Let's stop an' camp. It's no use walking about all night this way."

"Yes—let's camp," assented the entire band.

"Well, we'll try it, anyhow."

They accordingly set to work to build a fire and put out their usual guards against a surprise.

The moment they stopped the strange Indian disappeared from sight, and they saw nothing more of him during the night.

But to guard against doing him any harm, should he again appear, Jed told the guards not to fire on him in case he did appear.

"Unless he has others with him, pay no attention to him," was the instruction given the guards.

But they saw nothing more of the Indian until sunrise, when he again appeared, looking as majestic as a barbaric king, and proceeded to help himself to some of the venison steaks the whites had broiled for their breakfast.

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERIOUS SAVAGE AGAIN—THE RESCUE.

The savage ate with a ravenous appetite, yet paid not the slightest attention to the men whose food he was consuming so freely. He seemed to regard his right to the food as one that could not be questioned, nor did he make any remark while eating, though he saw that the whites were regarding him very closely.

During the time he was eating Nick and Jed eyed him very closely, as if to fully satisfy themselves of his sanity. Neither of them had ever seen an insane person to know him as such, but they had heard that insanity was betrayed by eyes lacking expression in their glances.

To them the savage seemed perfectly sane in his eyes. He seemed to be keen-eyed and watchful, and at the same time as fearless as a lion.

"Well," said Nick, after watching him for some time, "this beats anything I ever saw in the shape of a redskin."

"Yes," said Jed. "It beats me clean out. He don't act like most redskins. He puzzles me all over."

Having finished his meal, the redskin wrapped his blanket about his tall form and strode away into the forest with the dignified demeanor of one who had condescended to honor those about him with his presence.

"Crazy or no crazy," said one of the party, "he knows how to eat his belly full of other people's food."

"That's so," assented several of the party.

"Well, we may not see him again," said Jed. "We must move on now before our trail is found."

They pushed on through the forest in the direction of the village, where they suspected the two women had been carried as captives.

When the sun was just disappearing behind the trees in the distance they came in sight of the smoke of the village.

"Thar's the village," said Jed, as he caught sight of the thin, blue columns of smoke. "We must wait till the stars come out, an' then see whar the women are."

They laid close under the bushes for several hours, waiting for a chance to get nearer to the village without being discovered. At last Nick said he would go forward and see what he could find out.

"Stay whar yer are," he said to the others, and then he crept forward in the darkness.

There were but few stirring about in the village, as it was now near midnight. A few old crones sat in the wigwams near the lower end of the village, smoking villainous pipes, the strong odor of which had driven all the dogs to the upper end.

"They would be likely to place the captives in charge of the old women of the village," said Nick to himself, and so he turned in the direction of the lower end of the village. The first wigwam he approached had a stifling odor of old pipes. But he endured the torture, and peeped through a small crevice, only to find three old crones and an aged warrior silently puffing away at their pipes.

Thence he made his way among the other wigwams, peeping into every one in search of the captives. He was beginning to feel discouraged, when he suddenly beheld a tall Indian warrior standing in front of one of the wigwams. The moment he saw him the hunter shrank back behind the other wigwam to avoid being seen.

He knew that a single whoop would empty every wigwam in the village, and bring a swarm of vengeful savages about him.

But he kept his eyes on the warrior, and waited for him to go away. He did not seek an encounter now. He wanted to pursue the search for the captives, and fight only when attacked.

A half hour passed, and the tall warrior stood like a statue in front of the wigwam. Nick was greatly puzzled to know what it meant. He watched the savage and noticed that he stood motionless, as if merely trying to see how long he could remain in one position.

Suddenly the thought occurred to Nick that he might be the crazy Indian, of whom he had seen nothing during the day or evening. He resolved to find out if such was the fact, and accordingly moved very cautiously around the wigwam in the rear of the savage.

Stepping as softly as the cat, the hunter gained the position he sought, and got near enough to satisfy himself that his suspicions were correct.

He was within two feet of the singular savage, and could have touched him with his hand had he wished to do so. That the Indian was unarmed he well knew, and therefore had nothing to fear from him in that regard.

But would he not give an alarm, and thus bring the warriors in the village in a swarm about him?

He stood several moments in doubt, and was about to retire to consult with Jed back in the forest, when he heard a woman's voice in good English inside the wigwam. That decided him how to act, and the next moment he was peering at the inmates through a crevice in the skin wigwam.

To his surprise he found the wigwam occupied by two

white women, and two old Indian crones. The white women were in deep dejection, and their faces bore traces of tears. Who they were he had no means of knowing, as he had never seen either of them before. But he believed them to be the captives they were in search of.

"Now what shall I do?" Nick asked himself a dozen times in as many seconds. To go in there and attack the two old crones would bring the warriors about him in swarms, and a horrible death would be his. He concluded, at last, to go and see Jed and the others about it, and act on their united judgment.

When he turned to go he found himself face to face with a stalwart Mingo warrior.

Quick as a flash he saw that he would have to cut for it or else fight the whole village. But in his wrath at having his game spoiled he made a desperate pass at the warrior's throat. He struck it, and, much to his surprise, the warrior gave a groan and sank down at his feet, his jugular severed in twain.

Nick stopped as he was about to fly, rejoiced that his blow had been so effective, and peered around to see if anyone had heard the groan. He saw no one save the tall savage in front of the wigwam, who stood there like a statue, as though he heard nothing.

Then he peered through the crevice, and saw that the two old crones had taken their pipes out of their mouths and assumed listening attitudes. He kept quiet, and a few moments later one of them arose and came out.

Nick crouched close to the ground so as to avoid being seen, if possible. But she came right up against him. He sprang up and drew his knife across her throat so quickly that she never knew what hurt her. She sank down to the ground and yielded up the ghost.

"That's good!" thought Nick, as he wiped the blood from his blade. "She's a woman, but that's all the same just now. Hark! The other one is coming!"

He crouched by the wigwam and waited for the other old crone to come out. She came, but stopped near the entrance, just behind the tall Indian, and called to her companion in a low tone of voice. Getting no answer, she came round to the other side, where Nick was crouching like a tiger.

Suddenly she saw a dark form rise up before her, and felt a quick, sharp pain shoot across her throat, and she sank down at his feet as the other had done.

"By the great bear!" mentally exclaimed Nick. "I can take the two women away with me now."

Drawing his knife through the skin of the wigwam, he made a slit at least four feet long, and poked his hand through it.

The two captives sprang to their feet on seeing a white man with a knife in his hand.

"Keep quiet!" he whispered. "I am a friend from Willard's Settlement, where Nora is. Come with me. Be quick and make no noise."

Both women fell on their knees and clasped their hands in silent prayer, and then, after a few moments, sprang up and passed out of the opening into the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PERILOUS NIGHT MARCH.

Out in the open air Nick grasped the hand of the one nearest to him and whispered:

"Take the other's hand and follow me."

The two women grasped hands, and quietly permitted him to lead them into the thicket at the lower end of the village. They said not a word, but they could hear each other's heart

beat as they moved silently after the man who had so suddenly and unexpectedly rescued them from their savage captors.

When out some little distance in the woods, Nick came to a halt and made a low signal.

In a moment or two a dark form came through the bushes toward them.

"What is it, Nick?" Jed asked, for he it was.

"They are hyer,"

"Who?"

"Mrs. Munroe and her sister."

"Great gosh!" ejaculated Jed in dumfounded amazement.

"Come, we must git away before their escape is found out," said Nick.

"Yes. Can the ladies stand a night-march?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Munro. "We have had a good rest, and are willing to walk all night, if it is necessary. Tell me, did my daughter get to Willard's settlement?"

"Yes," said Jed, "an' as sound as a dollar, ther gamest little gal that ever rode a horse!"

"Thank God!" murmured the mother, the tears gushing from her eyes. "I can endure any hardship to get where she is. She is all I have left in the wide world now."

"Oh, no, ma'am," said Nick. "You have your sister, and everybody at Willard's is your friend. But, come on. We have men enough to protect you."

The entire party then shook hands with the two women, after which they placed them in the center and started in a bee-line for the Muskingum River.

After a few hours' march the first gray streaks of dawn began to appear. The women were tired, sleepy and hungry. Nick ordered a halt, cooked a good breakfast of venison steaks, rested an hour, and then resumed the march.

"They can follow our trail at a full run," said Nick, "so we may expect to have a hot fight in the afternoon."

"Oh, mercy!" cried Mrs. Munroe, wringing her hands, "and we will all be killed."

"Some of us may fall," said Nick, "but I reckon they won't whip us. We have a dozen good men, and they are worth five Injuns each. I reckon."

But the day wore on, and no signs of pursuers were seen.

They began to hope that the savages had concluded not to pursue.

But they were destined to a great disappointment.

Just as the sun was sinking in the west, a wild yell, accompanied by a shower of arrows, told them the Indians had caught up with them. The hunters wheeled and gave them a volley that laid five of them out on the grass, and wounding as many more.

The savages then took to the trees for protection, and the whites did the same. A few more shots were fired, after which it was discovered that another party of Indians had come up from the opposite direction their pursuers had come.

Jed was in grave trouble, and thought for awhile that they were on the eve of being overwhelmed by superior numbers. His only hope lay in the fact that under the cover of night, now fast approaching, they would probably be able to slip away and gain another march on them.

This was his only hope, and it grew stronger as the darkness increased. He whispered to Nick, and Nick communicated the hope to the others.

The darkness came on very fast in the great wilderness after the sun went down. The savages began to build fires around them to prevent their escape during the night. Jed saw the great danger of any further delay. The circle of fires extended two-thirds the way round them, when he slipped away, with the others following close at his heels.

Ten minutes later they were once more out of the clutches of the savages, and lost no time in getting away from the very dangerous vicinity.

They made as fast time as the darkness and bushes would permit, and three hours passed ere they halted a moment. Then the sight of a campfire in front caused the halt.

"Go forward an' see what it is, Nick," said Jed; and Nick obeyed, whilst the others laid down on the grass to wait for his return.

A half hour later Nick returned and whispered to Jed:

"It's a party of ten Injuns, an' the river is just t'other side the fire, an' two good canoes are near the river bank."

"By gum!" ejaculated Jed; "ef we kin git them canoes we kin git away an' leave no trail."

"We kin git 'em," said Nick, in low tones. "Lead 'em down thar," pointing in the direction indicated, "an' wait close to the water till I come with 'em."

Jed turned and whispered the hope to the others, and then led off. Nick went in another direction.

When he reached the river Nick, who had given his rifle to Jed, slipped into the water as softly as a rat, and swam down to where the two canoes were. The redskin on guard was sitting by the campfire with his back toward the river. But the hunter could see that he was wide awake, and that he would have to be cautious indeed to get the canoes away without being discovered.

But he was a man of infinite resources as well as nerve. He saw that the paddles were in the two canoes, and that all he had to do was to cut them loose and let them float with the current. Then he could swim after them and pull them in to the shore wherever wanted.

That he succeeded in doing, and the savage sentinel sat at his post unconscious of what was going on around him. Down the river the two canoes floated, and the bold hunter swam after them, overtaking them when nearly opposite where Jed and the others were waiting for him. A few signals soon indicated the proper place to land, and in a little while the whole party were in the canoes and ready to start.

Willard's Settlement was upstream, so Nick suggested that they row over to the other side and go up under the deep shadow of the trees. It was agreed to, and the two canoes shot out into the stream under the strong arms of men who knew how to handle the paddles.

Once on the other side they pulled upstream, and soon passed the Indian camp without being heard. When a mile or so above their starting point, they pulled for the middle of the stream, and then laid to the work like beavers. The two canoes shot through the water like things of life, and the miles were reeled off in rapid succession.

Both the women were given a chance to snatch a few hours of the sleep they so much needed. They slept until near daylight, when the two canoes were run in to the bank and the party landed. The men were so much exhausted from constant hard rowing and loss of sleep that they were forced to stop and rest.

On the banks of the river they laid down to rest and sleep, making no fire to attract attention. Two guards were put out, and told that they could sleep in the boats when they started again.

The sun was two hours up when the party woke and prepared to move again. They built a fire, cooked a hasty breakfast, and were off again.

A few miles further up the stream, an arrow whizzed past Nick Nelson's head and fell into the water beyond.

"By gum!" exclaimed Nick, "that was a close shot. Two inches nearer, an' it would have split my face open. Thar's redskins around hyer."

Suddenly a wild chorus of yells burst upon them from the woods on the left, and a shower of arrows came whistling around them. Two of the whites were wounded, one of them quite painfully, and the two women frightened almost to death.

"Give 'em some lead!" cried Jed, as he saw some two-score

or more of Mingo warriors rush to the water's edge and discharge their arrows at the two canoes.

The whites leveled their deathdealing rifles, after taking deliberate aim, at the howling reds on the river bank, and fired.

Every shot told, and the reds were astonished as well as enraged at the havoc the volley made.

After that they kept well in the bushes and sent a shower of arrows at the canoes whenever a chance occurred. The whites moved over to the further side of the river, and kept on upstream, giving the reds a shot whenever one of them gave them a chance at his coppery carcass. When they did fire they generally heard a death-yell from some unlucky aborigine.

But the Indians seemed to be determined to run them down, and so kept up the chase all through the day.

CHAPTER XII.

A LONG CHASE—A STRANGE LOVER.

Such a chase was bound to lead to a collision at some time, unless the pursued met assistance from some source. Ther again, if the pursuers were to divide their force, and manage to get part of it on the other bank of the river, they would have the canoes between two fires and almost at their mercy.

Jed began to look serious.

He saw the danger that would follow in the event of the reds crossing the river.

"Does anyone know how far we are from Willard's?" he asked, looking from one to the other.

"We ought to reach thar to-night, said Nick; "but then I don't know how fast we are going in these canoes."

"Well, we can't stop as long as them reds is followin' us," remarked Jed.

"No, that's a fact."

"Don't stop on our account," said one of the women. "We can go without food a whole week, if necessary."

"Oh, we can't stop," said Nick. "Thar's too many reds in that band. We'd lose our har, sure. But if we should meet any canoes, we would be in a bad fix."

"Well, we may not meet any," said Mrs. Munroe. "At least we will hope we will not, anyhow."

"Yes," said Sarah Norris, Mrs. Munroe's sister. "We will hope for the best and do our best. Rather than fall into their hands again I would prefer to sleep at the bottom of this river."

"Before they shall have you again," said Nick, looking her full in the face, "I would lay down my life in your defense."

"So would all of us!" cried the others, and the two women burst into tears at this devotion of the brave men around them.

Just then an Indian warrior appeared in full view on the river bank and indicated a desire to parley with the whites.

"What do you want, redskin?" Nick called out to him.

"Me want to talk with my paleface brothers," was the savage's reply from the shore.

"What do you want to talk about?" Nick asked.

"Peace," was the reply.

"Well, go away and let us alone and you will have peace," returned Nick.

"Ugh! we want the paleface women," cried the savage.

"Shoot him down!" cried the hunters, in a rage, and a half dozen rifles were leveled at him.

The savage did some lofty tumbling to get out of the way of the bullets, and in just two seconds he was out of sight in the bushes.

A shower of arrows came from the bushes, but not one struck the canoes, owing to the distance, as well as to the fact that they dared not show themselves where they could take a good aim.

"Now, keep your eyes on them," said Nick, "and every time you see a red, let him have a bullet."

Two men in each canoe were detailed to watch and keep up the fire, whilst the others rowed.

Thus mile after mile was passed, the monotony of the thing being broken now and then by a death-yell from some redskin who had run against a bullet.

When they were making a short bend in the river in the afternoon, an arrow came whizzing through the air and struck a young man in the forward canoe in the neck. The jugular-vein was cut, and the unfortunate young man bled to death in two or three minutes.

Yells of triumph burst from the reds as they saw the effects of the shot, which were answered by a volley from the whites.

Sarah Norris was horror-struck as the young man's blood spurted over her dress. She looked toward the shore, and saw a warrior peering through the bushes at her, and then a furious desire to avenge the young man's death seized her.

Taking up his rifle, she stood up in the canoe and took deliberate aim at the savage, who made a wry face at her. The next moment she pulled the trigger, and the redskin dropped dead in his tracks.

"Hurrah! that's a good shot," cried Nick. "Give her another gun, an' let her git even with 'em!"

Another rifle was handed her, and she waited for another chance to bring down one of the demons.

Pretty soon she caught sight of one as he was running from one tree to another. She raised her rifle and fired quickly and the savage went down with a howl.

"Give her another gun!" cried Nick. "She's the best shot in the crowd."

Taking another gun, she very soon had another one down, a fact that changed the tenor of the savage yells. They were dismayed at the terrible execution of the palefaced maiden, and kept well out of view for some time after the third man had fallen under her unerring aim.

Sarah was as pale as death.

"I never thought I could kill a human being," she said, after a long silence, "but now I feel like turning Indian-slayer, and hunt them from the face of the earth."

"Sarah, Sarah!" remonstrated Mrs. Monroe, "remember you are a woman."

"I am no longer one, sister," she said. "I would rather see an Indian die than follow the avocations of a woman."

"Good!" cried Nick. "That's another redskin! Give him a bullet, Miss Norris. He's lookin' love at you!"

She raised her rifle and took aim. The savage was calling for a parley. She did not understand his signs, and the next moment sent a bullet through his head.

He fell into the water and floated away with the current.

"That's four!" cried Jed in the greatest delight.

"If you kill two more, I will go down on my knees to you and ask you to be my wife!" cried Ben Murchison, a stalwart young hunter in the next canoe.

She looked straight at the young pioneer, and saw that he was brave, handsome and true, and in her heart resolved to win him if she could. But it was not a time or place to smile and make love. She kept her eyes on the shore, and watched for another shot. It soon came, and another redskin went down. Just two minutes later another followed, and then young Murchison dropped on his knees, and, extending his hands toward her, said:

"I love you, brave Miss Norris, and lay my heart and hand at your feet. If I can find favor in your eyes, and you will be my wife, I shall be the happiest man in all the world!"

She looked at him in supreme astonishment, and for the first time a faint flush came into her pale cheeks. She was on the eve of making a reply, when she caught sight of another redskin drawing his bow to send an arrow at her. Quick as a flash the color left her cheeks, her eyes flashed fire, and the sharp, whip-like crack of her rifle sent a leaden messenger of death to his heart.

Ere the death-yell of the savage reached those in the canoes, the whites sent up wild cheers, and waved their coonskin caps in the air.

But they did not cease to pull at the oars, and send the canoes flying through the water at a high rate of speed.

Sarah Norris came near falling into the water, and had to resume her seat till another chance to down a redskin occurred.

By and by the sun went down, and the yells of the reds indicated that they had greater hopes than ever of being able to capture the canoes. The weary hunters pulled steadily at the oars and hoped that the coming darkness would aid them instead of their enemies.

At last the stars came out, and the weary rowers kept nearer to the middle of the stream.

"They can't see so well now," said Nick, "and we can have a better chance to see which way we are going."

"Hark! Listen!" said Jed, as he stopped rowing and listened.

The others did likewise.

Up the river they could distinctly hear the paddles of a number of canoes coming down the stream.

"More redskins!" he whispered. "We must pull for the bank and take our chances in the woods."

Just then a yell from the other canoes caused the whites to see their danger, and a run for the banks was made.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ESCAPE IN THE WILDERNESS.

Just a moment or two after the two canoes shot in under the shadow of the trees, several canoes filled with Indians swept past them on their way down the river. Jed and Nick hoped they would pass on without stopping, and thus leave them to pursue their journey unmolested.

But they were doomed to disappointment. The savages on the other side of the river yelled out to them that there were two canoes full of palefaces on the further shore.

Then the yelling became perfectly terrible in intensity, and the canoes turned from their course and shot shoreward.

Nick and Jed saw and understood the danger, and very promptly met it by running away from it.

"Come this way," said Jed, leaping ashore, "and hold to each other's hands, so as not to get separated."

"Let's give 'em a volley first," suggested one of the party.

"No," said Nick. "They will send a shower of arrows at the flash of our rifles, and may do a great damage. Come away. They can't see our trail in the dark. Come on—quick!"

Holding to each other's hands, the brave pioneers led the way into the forest, holding themselves in readiness to die, if necessary, to protect the two rescued women in their midst.

The savages landed and found the two abandoned canoes. Their anger at the escape of their intended victims found vent in wild yells of rage.

They knew that pursuit in the darkness was worse than useless, so they did not attempt it.

But they were now wandering about in the woods without chart or compass.

"Nick," said Jed, "we want to find out where we are afore we go any further."

"Yes," replied Nick. "We want to go east. I know that much, dark as it is."

"Well, one must climb a tree and find out which way is east," said another.

"Let's hunt around till we find a tall tree," Nick said, and the hunt commenced.

But during the hunt they walked a good way into the forest. At last one of the party, whose hearing was very acute, declared that he heard voices in a certain direction.

The others listened, and thought they could also hear voices.

"Then we will go in that direction," said Nick, and he led off, followed by the whole party, clinging to each other's hands.

A mile was passed, and then they came to the edge of a clearing, in the center of which they saw several cabins with lights in them.

"Why, bless my soul!" cried one of the men. "This is our home! We are at Willard's Settlement! Whoop! Hurrah!"

The balance of the party were amazed at the sudden turn in their good fortune, and could not believe their eyes and ears at first. But when they heard the glad shouts of welcome from the families in their cabins they, too, joined in the general hurrah.

Torches were lighted, and men and women ran out to welcome them back to their homes.

"Oh, my mother!" cried Nora Munroe, rushing out of the cabin where she had found a home. "Have you found my mother and Aunt Sarah? Tell me—tell me quick!"

"My child! my child!" screamed the overjoyed mother, rushing forward and clasping Nora in her arms.

"Mother! Mother!" cried Nora, in a wild paroxysm of joy.

Sarah Norris ran up, and all three were clasped in each other's arms, whilst others looked on and rejoiced with them.

Then came a shadow of gloom over the little settlement, when the news of Dick Ellis' death by the redskins was announced. He was a brave youth whom everyone liked. But when it was told how fearfully Sarah Norris had avenged him every eye was turned on the maiden aunt of the young Nora. She was taken to their hearts at once, as her pretty niece had been, and every family stood ready to offer her and her widowed sister a home.

But they were all tired and hungry, and anxious to get both food and sleep. A supper was soon prepared for all of them, and they did ample justice to everything that was set before them. Then they all retired to rest, and in the still hours of the night Nora's mother told her of the offer of marriage Sarah had received from Ben Murchison.

"Oh, I do hope Aunt Sarah will accept him!" said Nora. "She would be so happy if married to a good man like him."

"Maybe she will," said her mother, "though she did not say anything at the time. She did blush like a young girl, though, and I thought I could see a happy look in her eyes."

The next morning there was a happy gathering at Willard's Settlement, for the three women were once more united and among friends. The Indians had been signally defeated in their attack on the blockhouse, and were not likely to attempt it again very soon.

Several days were spent in resting and talking over the events of the rescue of the two women, and the strange conduct of the tall Indian who had come into the white men's camp unarmed and undaunted. Old Ben Willard remembered having met the same Indian once himself, and told the story to the hunters. But young Ben Murchison had a different story to tell, and he did not tell it to but one individual. Sarah Norris had known him but a week, when she listened to his story and consented to become his wife as soon as he had a cabin built for her to live in.

While Ben was making his arrangements to build him a home, Nick and Jed were preparing to take leave of the settlement and return to their homes on the Allegheny river.

Of course, old Ben Willard wanted them to make their homes at his settlement, but they both declined.

"Our traps is all over thar," said Jed, "an' we've got a lot o' pelts hid away for the traders when they come."

"Beaver is plentiful on the Muskingum," old Ben said, "an' we will soon have a trading-post hyer whar you can sell all your pelts. Thar's more safety when more rifles git together."

Pretty Nora Munroe went up to Jed, and, laying her hand on his arm, looked up in his face and said:

"We shall miss you ever so much if you go away, Mr. Hotchkiss, and we will not feel so safe from the Indians."

That touched the hunter in a tender place, and he said:

"I will come back agin an' see yer."

"Oh, will you? I am so glad to hear that!" and the bright look that came into her eyes caused the terrible Indian fighter to turn his gaze in another direction, and his heart fluttered like a bird in a cage.

"Yes," said Nick, "we will come back agin soon, an' see about the beavers hyer," and then the two hunters shook hands with every man, woman and child in the settlement, after which they shouldered their rifles and plunged into the great forest.

Having no one in charge to look after and guide through the trackless wilderness, our two heroes pushed on with good speed toward the Allegheny river. They knew that every one of their traps was full of game by this time, and were particularly anxious to reach them as soon as possible.

Late in the afternoon they ran across a fresh Indian trail.

"By gum!" exclaimed Jed. "They are out strong! Hope they ain't goin' up our way."

"They are a war party," said Nick, after examining the trail a few minutes, "an' going right up our way, sure."

They were not sure how far ahead the redskins were, and so were at once on their guard against running into them.

As if to tempt them to fire their rifles and thus alarm the redskins and make their presence known, a huge black bear in a clump of bushes rose on his hind feet and gave Jed a tremendous blow with his paw. Jed staggered backward from the force of the blow, and the bear advanced, as if to repeat the blow or give him one of his fatal hugs.

"Take care, thar!" cried Nick, as he saw Bruin making for him.

Jed dropped his rifle, as he dared not fire, and drew his hunting-knife. Bruin growled and prepared to meet him. Nick also ran forward, knife in hand, and the combat commenced.

The bear was very pugnacious, and acted as though he wanted to make a meal of both the hunters. He struck right and left with his huge paws, the claws of which seemed like so many steel blades to cut and tear. The hunters resolved to kill him, however, and set about to do it. Getting him between them, they gave him stab after stab, till at last he gave a groan of despair and rolled over in the agonies of death.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTURED AGAIN.

As they sprang back out of the reach of the last blow of the dying bear, the two hunters were amazed at seeing the tall, mysterious Indian, who had last been seen at the door of the Mingo wigwam where the two captive women were kept. He had the same air of conscious dignity about him, the same

disdain of the palefaces, and the same fearlessness of demeanor that had first attracted attention.

"By gum!" ejaculated Jed. "Thar he is agin!"

Nick stared at him, and held his rifle in readiness to fire if any more of the same color put in an appearance. But no more came. Only the mysterious chief came forward.

He stood over the dead bear and appeared to be satisfied at seeing him there.

"Ugh!" he grunted, and then spoke in a jargon which neither Nick nor Jed could understand one syllable of, try hard as they would.

"Want some b'ar meat, chief?" Jed asked, in a friendly way.

The chief turned and gave him a contemptuous glance, and made no reply. Then he wrapped his blanket about his tall form again, and stalked away, as if the two palefaces were too insignificant for him to notice.

"By gum!" exclaimed Jed, gazing after the redskin. "He's so darned aristocratic under that old blanket that he can't speak to a white man."

"Of all the redskins I ever saw," Nick said, "he is the queerest. I don't know what to think of him."

"Nor do I," remarked Jed, taking one of the paws of the dead bear in his hand, as if to feel the weight of it. "I never saw him with any weapons in his hands. I wonder what he would have done had this fellow met him instead of us?"

"He is as strong as any bear, Jed," said Nick. "He threw me off the night I caught hold of him as easily as if I had been a mere child."

Jed commenced cutting off one of the hams of the bear, at which work Nick assisted. In a minute or two the ham was cut and several large slices taken from it and stowed away.

This done, they resumed their journey, turning slightly out of their way to avoid the war party whose trail they had seen that afternoon.

When night came on they sought a very secluded little dell, where a light would not be seen any great distance. There they made a fire and cooked the bear steaks, which they had secured for that purpose.

The odor of the broiling steaks filled the woods, and the two hunters began to fear that Indians would be attracted by it, and thus betray their presence in the forest.

"We must eat quickly and then move somewhar else to sleep," said Nick, as he looked uneasily around.

"Yes," said the other; "ef thar be any hungry redskins about, this ere steak 'll fetch 'em, sure," and he laid the steak on a piece of bark and made ready to do justice to it.

But at that moment the tall unknown savage again put in his appearance, and stalked up to where the tempting steaks were lying, and helped himself to the largest one, and began devouring it as ravenously as a hungry wolf would have done.

"By gum!" exclaimed Jed, as he watched the proceeding, "he don't say anything about paying board, does he?"

"No. I reckon he don't pay anywhar," and Nick snatched up one of the steaks to make sure he would not have to go to bed supperless.

Jed took the other one for himself, and that left the uninvited guest without another.

He did not seem to notice that there were no more, however, and acted as though he was willing to wait till more were cooked.

To humor him, Jed broiled another, and offered it to him, hot enough to burn his fingers off. But he did not mind that in the least, taking it and devouring it ravenously.

Then another followed, after which he seemed satisfied. But he did not deign to notice the two palefaces whose hospitality he had enjoyed. On the contrary, he proudly drew the folds of his blanket about him and stalked away as silently as he came.

"Nick, that fellow will git us in trouble ef we don't wipe him out. Whar he goes, thar's more like 'im."

"Jed, he ain't a Mingo."

"Yes, he is," returned Jed. "He has all the makeup of a Mingo."

"Why, he can't speak a word of the Mingo tongue!"

"Don't believe a word of it," growled Jed. "I won't feed 'im no more. He don't so much as say 'thank yer' for all he gits."

"Waal, as long as he comes unarmed, we can't hurt 'im."

"No, but we kin kick 'im out."

"Mebbe not. He may kick harder than we can."

Jed laughed, and was about to turn away to look after the provisions, when he was startled by a pandemonium of yells. At the same moment several hundred Indians rushed forward and surrounded them.

Nick and Jed saw the hopelessness of resistance. But they were not the men to allow themselves to be taken without a blow, so they fired their rifles, each laying out a savage. Then they clubbed their rifles and crushed two skulls ere the redskins recovered from their astonishment. But they were quickly overpowered by the mere weight of numbers, and made prisoners.

"Palefaces heap big fools," said a chief, who was angry at the death of four warriors.

"Not such fools as you think, redskin," said Nick, who always made it a point never to show any fear of the savages when in their presence. "We have laid out four coppery skunks, and that is some satisfaction to us."

"Ugh! Heap big fool. Injun burn paleface fools at stake."

"Oh, I don't care anything for your fire. I've been burnt three times already."

The chief looked at him in surprise, as if the boast startled him, and then, after a pause of several minutes, said:

"Heap big liar, too," and then turned away to let others jeer them.

CHAPTER XV.

AT THE STAKE—THE RESCUE.

The two prisoners were bound and tied to saplings, and a guard of two stalwart savages placed over each. They seemed as cool as if they were the masters of the situation instead of being captives, and retorted to every taunt the redskins hurled at them, till they saw a white man approach, who seemed to have some influence over them.

"Who are you?" the white man asked.

"We are white men," replied Nick. "Can you say as much?"

"Oh, yes. I am a white man," replied the other, a sinister smile playing around his lips as he spoke.

"Mebbe you are, an' mebbe you ain't," said Jed, suspecting him of being a renegade. "What's your name, anyhow?"

"My name is Simon Girty," said the man, with a cruel smile on his face. "Maybe you have heard of me before?"

"Yes," said Jed, his eyes blazing; "I've heard of a cowardly white-livered skunk by that name, 'who leads Indians agin the whites, and murders women and children. Are you the man?"

"Yes; I am the man you speak of," replied Girty. "I generally amuse myself with such brave-talking fellows as you. We'll have a roast and dance to-night, and you shall take part in the fun."

"Oh, go on with your fun, you white-livered renegade!" cried Jed. "I ain't afraid of such things as you—not a bit."

"Spit in his face, Jed!" cried Nick, who was tied to a sapling some little distance from Jed.

"Maybe you would like to do that yourself," said Girty, stepping quickly round in front of Nick.

"Yes, certainly," and with that Nick spat direct in the renegade's face.

With a curse Simon Girty drew his knife and made a rush at the prisoner. Nick raised his right foot—which was not tied—and gave him a kick that sent him rolling in the dirt ten feet away, amid the uproarious laughter of the warriors. He sprang to his feet, and was about to make another attack on him, when a chief stopped him.

"Let my white brother wait and see his enemy burn at the stake. His heart will be glad when he hears the groans come from the flames."

"Yes, my red brother, the great chief is right," said Girty, who was really sick from the blow he had received. "I will wait and listen to the groans of the white prisoner. He is the red man's enemy, and ought to die at the stake."

"Bah!" said Jed, in as contemptuous a tone as he could assume. "Simon Girty, you are a dirty, cowardly renegade skunk! That's what you are. I would like to have my hands tied behind my back and be allowed to use my feet on you. I wouldn't touch you with my hands. Oh, no. I'd just kick you round these hyer woods till the leaves turned red and fell to the ground."

"They will turn red when you feel the flames around you," hissed Girty. "You will never see another sunshine. You will roast to-night."

"Go on with your roast. I am not afraid of fire."

"Nor I, either," put in Jed. "I like fire, I do."

"Brag won't do you any good," said Girty, and he turned away to consult with one of the chiefs.

The warriors began to make preparations for the burning, and large piles of fagots were soon gathered and placed near the two captives, whose feet were now bound to the saplings. In a very few minutes the fagots were piled up waist-high around the prisoners.

Then the torch was applied to both of them, and the red tongues of flame began to climb up among them. The two hunters made up their minds that their time had come. There were too many redskins around for them to dream of getting away, even though they were able to free themselves from the stake.

"Simon Girty!" cried Nick, "may the curse of God rest on your soul! You will live in a hotter fire than this will be, and you will suffer forever. Our sufferings will last but a few minutes. I can stand it, and only regret that such a cowardly wretch lives to repeat the crime."

"That's a very fine speech," said Girty, laughing in a mocking way; "now sing us your death-song."

"Oh, you'll sing a song before long that will pay for all this!" cried Jed, as the flames began to blaze up and warm his legs.

Suddenly an awful yell broke upon them—a yell that was well calculated to strike terror into the heart of any ordinary mortal, and was followed by the rush of an Indian, who upset Girty and sent him rolling on the ground. He came with an angry energy that seemed to appall all the savages around the two prisoners, for he yelled at them, and then fell to kicking the burning fagots right and left. The savages howled like so many demons, and ran here and there as if undecided what to do under the circumstances.

By a quick movement he cut the bonds that bound Nick and Jed to the saplings, and motioned to them to leave at once.

Both men bounded away with the speed of deer, and in a moment or two were safe in the impenetrable darkness of the forest, whilst the excited redskins were yet making the welkin ring with their yells.

"By gum, Nick!" exclaimed Jed, when they were a half mile distant from the light of the Indian camp, "that was our tall redskin who ate supper with us to-night."

"Yes, the same," replied Nick; "an' I want to see him once more."

"So do I. He's a queer one, but is the best I ever saw. They all seem to be afraid of him."

"Yes. I am more puzzled than ever about him. But he saved our roast for us, an' I won't forget it. He can eat with me as long as I have a mouthful of food."

"That fire scorched my legs."

"Just so. One of my legs was blistered. I knocked Girty down as I rushed past him. Had I gotten hold of any weapon I would have made short work of him, then and thar."

"We have nothing to fight with—no gun, knife, or anything. What shall we do?"

"Do the best we can. We are free, an' that's good luck, anyhow."

"So it is. We were in a tight place that time."

"Yes; the worst of all yet. Two minutes more an' we would have been roasting good. By gum! ef I ever git that dirty Girty in my power I'll turn Injun just one hour to give 'im a roast."

They made their way through the woods as best they could, not really knowing in what direction they were going. They were determined to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the redskins under Girty lest they should be recaptured.

All night long they trudged along through the forest, and daylight found them still pushing their way in an easterly direction.

Just as the last of the stars were fading away in the morning light, Nick Nelson uttered an exclamation of astonishment and halted.

"What is it?" Jed asked.

"Look thar!" answered Nick, pointing to a huge tree in front of them.

Jed looked.

"By gum!" he cried. "Our rifles, powderhorns an' knives!" and he sprang forward with the eager delight of a child and caught up his faithful weapons.

"Jed!" exclaimed Nick, as he examined his weapons and found them all right. "I don't know if I am asleep or awake. I must be dreaming."

Jed stared at his companion, and read in his face the story of his astonishment. They gazed at each other for several minutes, and then turned to their weapons again.

"I reckon we ain't asleep," Jed remarked, after a long pause. "At least, I ain't, I know," and he hugged his faithful rifle to his heart, as if the thing could appreciate his demonstrations of affection.

"Who brought 'em hyer?" Nick asked, looking around in search of some trail that would give him a clew to the mystery. But he could find nothing to clear it up, and so they both moved on toward the rising sun, in better spirits than ever before.

Ere they had gone a mile, Nick saw a deer bounding past, and quickly raised his rifle and fired. The deer sprang into the air and dropped dead.

"Thar's venison steaks for a breakfast," said Nick, stopping to reload, whilst Jed went forward to secure the game.

When he reached the deer he stooped and opened a vein in his neck to allow him to bleed. When he straightened himself up again he found himself standing face to face with the mysterious Indian chief!

CHAPTER XVI.

BACK AT THEIR TRAPS—THE INTRUDER.

To say that Jed was surprised by the sudden appearance of the Indian would be but a mild way of putting it. He was

utterly dumfounded for a moment or two, and could do no more than stare at him.

The Indian, however, did not seem to notice him. His whole attention was engrossed by the carcass lying at his feet. He gazed down at the dead deer as if he were trying to recall the days of his youth, when he followed the chase with such youthful enthusiasm.

"Hello, redskin!" cried Nick, suddenly coming forward and extending his hand toward him. "You did us a good turn last—hello! what's the matter?"

At the first sound of Nick's voice the chief gave a start, as if suddenly awakened from a dream, and then stared at both the hunters.

They returned his gaze for a moment or two, and then he glided away into the forest like a specter.

"By my soul!" exclaimed Nick, as he glared around at Jed, "that redskin beats all I ever saw. I believe he is the one who brought our weapons back."

"So do I. He must be a big chief among 'em."

"They don't seem to follow him, for he's always alone when we see him. It's strange. I don't understand him," and the hunter shook his head dubiously as he spoke.

Jed cut off one of the hams of the deer, and prepared slices from it to cook for breakfast, whilst Nick made a fire. Both were ravenously hungry from wandering about through the forest all night, as well as tired and sleepy. The loss of sleep was beginning to tell on them, and they saw that they would have to take a nap somewhere soon, or nature would break down.

When the venison steaks were broiling their savory odor seemed to fill the forest for many rods around. Several wolves came within rifle-range and sniffed the air with hungry eagerness; but the hunters dared not fire at them, lest the sound of the shots draw some prowling band of Indians to them.

Just as the first steaks were ready for eating, and were laid out on pieces of bark, the mysterious chief put in his appearance—coming from they knew not where—and stood over the savory pieces.

"Hyer's the chief!" exclaimed Nick, the moment he caught sight of him. Jed looked up and saw him, and the next moment rose up with the dark dish in his hand and presented it to him.

"Hyer, chief," he said. "Help yourself. We are glad to have you eat with us."

The chief looked at the tempting slices of steak and then at the hunter. The act seemed to surprise him, and for a moment or two he seemed to doubt the good intentions of the palefaces. Jed held the bark dish closer to him, and he took up one of the slices and began eating it. He ate with wolfish voracity, and took a second and third slice, which Jed held up before him as if he were a servant waiting on his master. Nick looked on, wondering what manner of Indian he was.

When he had eaten all he wanted the chief gave a grunt of satisfaction, turned on his heel, and strode away into the wilderness, leaving the two hunters to finish their breakfast by themselves, which they did.

When they had eaten their breakfast the two hunters shouldered their rifles and struck out toward the Allegheny river, hoping to reach it before sunset of that day.

Several times during the day they had to conceal themselves in thickets to avoid being seen by Indian hunting parties. They did not wish to come in contact with any more of them if they could help it. They had been twice at the stake inside of two weeks, and did not care to go through the same experience the third time.

A little before sunset on that day they came to the banks of a river. Jed looked out over the stream and said:

"Hyer's our river."

"Yes." And Nick sat down on a stone and drew a long

breath of relief. He was tired and sleepy, for neither of them had slept any in over forty hours.

"Let's git over thar," said Jed, pointing to the other side of the river.

"Yes, an' have a nap."

Down the stream about a mile they found a log lodged against the bank. They pushed it out into the 'current and clung to it, and worked their way over to the other side. There they pushed the log out again and sent it on its way down the stream to an unknown destination.

They did not stop to look about for a supper. They were too tired and sleepy to think of supper. Up the river a half mile they knew of a cavern under a cliff of solid rock. To that they made their way, with the intention of lying down for a long sleep.

When they reached the cavern they started in without taking any precautions.

A fierce growl caused them to run out much quicker than they had entered.

"It's a b'ar," said Nick.

"Yes," returned Jed, "an' we'll hev 'im out o' thar in two minutes," and he began making a bundle of fagots into a bunch for a torch.

Lighting the torch, the two hunters re-entered the cavern and moved cautiously forward till the light reflected a blazing pair of eyes. Nick aimed at them, while Jed held the torch, and fired.

A roar followed, and both hastily ran out to await the result of the shot.

The growls soon ended, and then they returned.

The carcass of a huge black bear was found.

"This will give us something for breakfast in the morning," remarked Nick, as he felt of the dead monster. "He is as fat as butter."

"Let's drag him out, cut off his hams, an' throw the rest of him into the river."

It was done, and the two hams were hung up out of reach of any other animals.

The two hunters then returned to the cave and laid down on the bed of leaves on which the bear had met his death. Both were soon in the land of dreams, and remained there till noon of the next day, at which time they woke up, greatly refreshed and ravenously hungry.

After making a hearty meal of bear steaks, the two hunters went off to look after their traps. They found them full of beavers. The whole of the afternoon was spent in securing the pelts, which they carried to the place where their catch was hidden.

Two weeks were passed in trapping and hunting. Bearskins, deerskins, wolfskins and many other skins were gathered in, and they began to look forward to the time when they would have to pay a visit to the trading-post near where Pittsburg now stands.

Several times they had to hide from the hunting parties of Indians who were out in search of game. They did not care to provoke any trouble so near their traps, as the hunting parties were strong enough to drive them away and destroy their traps, a thing they would very much deplore.

But the time came for them to go, and accordingly they packed their pelts in as small packages as possible, strapped them to their backs and started out.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRIPLE DUEL.

The trading-post was reached in two days, and they found but little difficulty in disposing of their pelts to good advantage.

Several days were spent in laying in a stock of ammunition and other necessary supplies. Each bought a brace of pistols to conceal about his person, to be used in case of sudden emergencies or in very close quarters with man or beast.

As was the case with all trading-posts on the frontiers, Indians were coming and going all the time, buying and selling beads and furs.

Nick and Jed met many old friends among whites and reds, and greeted them with the hearty cordiality that characterized them.

One day a small party of Mingo warriors came in to sell some furs and buy blankets for the coming winter. Nick went among them and discovered that three of them were the ones who had tried to burn him and Jed the night after the escape of Nora Munroe. They recognized him, too, and seemed uneasy about it.

He gave a whistle that brought Jed to his side.

"Do you know 'em?" Nick asked, pointing to the three Mingoes in the party.

Jed stared at them.

"Yes, I know 'em, drat 'em!" he replied.

"Ugh!" grunted the three savages in a sullen manner, and then they fell a-gabbing among themselves, and in a few minutes grew defiant—the others having promised to stand by them.

"Hyer, you yaller cowards!" cried Nick, "you've got to fight us whar we can hev some show. Three of us will fight three of you, an' the best man wins."

Indians were not cowards in those days. To decline a fight was not in their rule of action, and so they accepted the challenge, the duels to be fought with knives.

The Mingoes at once began blowing, as all savages do on the eve of a fight.

"Ugh! Palefaces run away from Injuns once. Injuns take 'um scalps now!"

Nick and Jed went among the white hunters and told their story, asking for a third man to meet the third Indian in the fight. A dozen volunteered at once, and the preparations for the fight went on very quietly.

The agent of the post tried hard to prevent the fight. But the hunters warned him to keep out of the way and not interfere in the matter.

"I'm going to hev my revenge on them pesky varmints," said Jed, "an' that right hyer," and all the white hunters at the post sustained him.

The utmost excitement prevailed, and all the whites went out to the clearing, armed to the teeth, to meet any demonstrations the reds might make.

When they reached the clearing they found the three warriors on hand, with a dozen others of their tribe.

"Now, redskins," said Nick, as he stripped for the fight, "I will give you a chance at my scalp again. Ef you can take my scalp you can hev it an' wear it at your belt. Now look out for your own ha'r," and with that the three whites and three reds ran together with drawn knives.

In such fights the whites always have the advantage, in that they understand the science of sparring better, of which the savages are utterly ignorant. In less than one minute one of the reds went down. The one Jed was contending with went down soon after, and only Nick and his man were left in the field.

Nick was merely amusing himself with the rascal. He wanted to torture him as much as possible, as well as to tantalize the other Mingoes, whose howls of rage attested their disappointment over the result.

"Hurry up, redskin," he said to the panting warrior, "or you will be late in reaching the happy hunting-ground to-day."

"Ugh! me take scalp when me go!" returned the warrior.

"Yes; take it with you, an' show it to the Great Spirit.

He'll give you a drink of firewater for it. White men's scalps are scarce over thar—look out! I got a piece of your nose that time!"

"Ugh!" grunted the savage, as he felt the sharp knife of the hunter clip off a piece from the end of his nose, and he made a rush at him to force the fight and either kill or be killed.

Nick saw his game, and gave him a blow between the eyes that sent him rolling over and over on the grass. The white hunters roared with laughter, and the Mingoes yelled like demons.

The warrior rose to his feet in a dazed sort of way and glared around him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Nick. "You would burn me at the stake, eh? I'll take your scalp from your head an' turn you loose to a living death!"

The savage made another desperate rush on the hunter and was knocked out again.

He rose to his feet and made another rush.

Down he went again.

This last blow stunned him so that he lay still on the grass till he felt a sharp pain on his head. He sprang up with a yell, only to have Nick slap him in his face with his scalp.

"Thar's yer scalp, redskin!" cried Nick. "Take it an' show it to your squaws!" and with that the hunter threw the scalp into his face and walked away.

The Mingoes howled like so many demons and broke in a run for the woods, leaving their unfortunate comrade alone where he had lost his scalp.

In those days the worst fate that could befall an Indian was to lose his scalplock. He was henceforth shunned by old and young among his people. None would speak to him; nor would he be allowed to dwell in any village of the tribe. His fate was worse than death. To die with the hair still on his head was honorable. To lose his hair and live was a living death.

"Now go and burn more whites!" cried Jed, as he passed the disgraced warrior, whose physical sufferings were such as no pen can describe. A shovelful of live coals on the top of one's head would not cause any worse suffering. The entire form of the stalwart savage quivered with the agony he endured.

But he could no longer mingle with his race. They would never sympathize with one who lost his scalp and lived, and so he had to wander in the trackless wilderness and die, maybe, from the terrible wound on his head.

When he strode away to the forest the white hunters looked after him, and mentally regretted that the whole Mingo tribe could not be served in the same way.

The agent at the post threatened to leave, saying that he would have a thousand Mingo warriors about him inside of a week.

The white hunters laughed, and told him that the three Indians had been killed in a fair fight, and that the tribe would not thus wage an open war with the government. Time would prove it, they said, and with that the subject was dropped.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NIGHT OF TERROR AND DARING WORK.

Having sold their pelts and purchased their ammunition, Nick and Jed shook hands with their friends, shouldered their rifles and started out to their old hunting-grounds again. They made direct for the Allegheny river, intending to devote another month to trapping on that stream.

But their first night in the forest sent them in quest of other and very different game. They were encamped about halfway between the trading-post and their traps, when they were attacked by a large party of Mingoos. Fortunately, they discovered their presence just in time to make their escape without any damage being done.

The darkness enabled them to remain in the vicinity without being seen or having the fear of immediate pursuit. They were so astonished at meeting such a large body of Mingoos on that side of the river that they resolved to investigate the cause of their presence there.

Concealed in the bushes near the campfires they perceived that the band had a number of white prisoners, two of whom they recognized as belonging to Willard's Settlement.

Knowing that all the young men at Willard's were eager hunters, who often went many miles from home, Nick and Jed thought it nothing strange that two of them had been captured. That more of them had not been killed or made prisoners was sheer good fortune.

But, while they were waiting and watching, the two prisoners, who suspected that Nick and Jed were in the vicinity, concluded to give signals which they believed they would understand.

But the first signal, which told the hunters who they were, was promptly cut short by the Mingo chiefs, who whacked them over their heads with the flat sides of their tomahawks.

"Ugh, be still!" said one of the chiefs. "Paleface one heap big fool," and he gave the young man a whack along the side of his head with a tomahawk.

Crack! went Jed's rifle, and the Indian fell dead at the feet of his prisoner.

Then pandemonium broke loose. Every redskin yelled at the top of his voice, and a shower of arrows went whizzing in the direction of the flash of the rifle.

But the two hunters nimbly changed positions the moment the shot was fired, and thus escaped unhurt. They rushed around to the south side of the camp and there laid in wait for something else to turn up.

A half hour or so passed, and the savages concluded that the two hunters had gone away, and began to amuse themselves at the expense of their white prisoners, one of whom they tied to a large tree, and threw their tomahawks with the intention of striking so close to his head as to cause him to squirm with fear and suspense.

As each tomahawk was thrown, the villains would roar with laughter. Nick and Jed watched the proceedings with no little interest, having themselves once passed through the same ordeal.

They well knew that the redskins did not intend to kill the prisoner that way, as their favorite mode of treatment was the stake, yet one savage threw his tomahawk so close as to wound the prisoner's ear; but it was the last tomahawk he ever threw, for the keen, whip-like crack of Nick Nelson's rifle sent a bullet whizzing through his brain.

The enraged redskins yelled louder than ever, and made a rush for the spot where they had seen the flash of the rifle. So excited did they become that their prisoners for a moment were entirely forgotten—a fact which the two hunters were not slow to perceive.

Slipping away in time to avoid the rush of the redskins, Nick and Jed moved around to the other side, and there concealed themselves in a clump of bushes to await for them to quiet down again, which they did in the course of another hour. But such was their savage anger that they resolved to take the trail at daylight, and run the two daring hunters to their death.

"Nick," whispered Jed to his comrade, "slip round to t'other side, and when I pop another redskin over, and they rush for me, you run in and cut the prisoners loose."

"Great b'ars!" said Nick, "I'll do it, Jed. Give me ten minutes, and then blaze away."

The two hunters grasped hands in token of an explicit understanding of the desperate undertaking, and then Nick slipped away in the darkness with the soft, stealthy steps of a panther.

Jed waited quietly until such time as he thought Nick had arrived at the opposite side of the camp, and then swept his eye over the band to select the most prominent warrior for his target. Then he took a deliberate aim and a chief went down, whilst a chorus of yells went up.

As was expected, the whole band made a rush in the direction of the shot, and Jed, in order to add to the excitement, drew his brace of pistols, gave them two shots in rapid succession, and then darted away out of the reach of danger.

It was then that Nick made a dash for the prisoners, and in less time than is taken to record it, the bonds that bound them were cut, and the five men were free.

They darted into the woods beyond the reach of the light, and in five minutes were joined by Jed, who led them away from the dangerous vicinity.

Mile after mile was passed, and the river reached a little before daylight. They searched around till they found a log, by means of which they got across the river without wetting their ammunition.

On the opposite bank of the river they made their way to one of the many caverns that abounded in that section of the country, leaving no trail on the rocks over which they passed.

"They will try to follow us, boys," said Nick, "and will keep it up as long as they can see the trail. If we had arms enough, I wouldn't be afraid of them, but we haven't and so must keep out of their way."

"If we had arms," said one of the rescued men, "we could follow the other party and rescue the girl."

"What girl?" demanded Jed.

"Why, Nora Munroe," was the reply. "She was captured three days ago."

Jed Hotchkiss staggered as if stricken a terrible blow, while his bronzed face changed to an ashen hue.

"They have got the brave girl again," he said, as if communing with his own thoughts. "A braver girl never lived, and Jed Hotchkiss is not the man to trap beavers or hunt any other game while she is in trouble."

"That's me, too, Jed," said Nick. "I'll go with you to the heart of the tribe and spill their last drop of blood for the gal."

"So will we," said the other five. "If we can get weapons count on us."

"You shall have weapons," said Nick. "We have nearly a dozen of old rifles and muskets in a cave up the river, whar we have more pelts hidden away."

"By gum!" said Jed, "I forgot about them. I reckon some of 'em is rusted."

"No," said Nick. "I put b'ar's grease on them when I was up thar."

It was immediately agreed upon that after breakfast, and taking two hours of sleep, they would make their way up the river to the little cavern where their treasure was concealed.

When they were ready to start it was nearly noon. In order to leave no trail behind them by which the savages could trace them they raised two sunken canoes, poured the water from them, put three in one and four in another, and bent all their energies paddling against the current.

Late in the afternoon they run into the left bank of the river at the foot of a rough, precipitous cliff, which could only be reached by way of the water.

Just as they landed they heard a crashing noise overhead, and, looking up, were almost paralyzed at seeing a stone

weighing at least two tons rolling like a thunderbolt down upon them.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BEAR AND THE STONE.

The terrible danger seemed to threaten immediate death to every one of the little party, for the huge stone was coming down upon them, crushing everything in its way.

"Save yourselves!" cried Jed, as he made a spring into the water, leaving his rifle lying on the ground. The others, moved by a common instinct, threw down their rifles, and dived into the water after him.

They were not a moment too quick. The great stone struck almost in their tracks, and then rolled into the river, crushing one of the canoes, and taking it to the bottom.

The last one to plunge in the water was almost grazed by the stone as it descended.

"That was a narrow escape!" exclaimed Nick, as he turned to swim back to the river-bank.

"Yes, an' the danger ain't over yit!" said Jed, looking up toward the top of the precipice.

"Is any more coming?" one of the party asked, looking in the same direction.

"I don't know," said the hunter, "but I know that that 'ere stone didn't start by itself. Somebody started it down on us."

"Injuns!" exclaimed one of the young men, "an' we ain't got our guns yit!"

Jed was the first one to get ashore, and he took up his rifle to examine it. Nick was the next one out, and his rifle also underwent a close inspection.

The stone had not touched either of them, and so they turned their attention to their powder-horns. But their fears were soon relieved in regard to their powder, which proved to be dry and uninjured.

But while they were examining their ammunition several small pebbles came rattling down from above.

Again every eye was gazing upward, and Nick and Jed stood ready to use their faithful weapons on any foe that might show himself.

The pebbles kept falling, and the hunters stood still, in great suspense, waiting to see what the next move would be.

Suddenly Nick exclaimed:

"Bless my soul! It's a b'ar!"

"A b'ar?"

"Yes. Thar he is, clingin' to that root up thar, an' it's as much as he can do to hold on."

The whole party had caught sight of him about the same time, and thus had their fears relieved in regard to the threatening danger.

A bear was a very different foe from an Indian.

"We'll hev a tussle when he comes down," said Jed, as he watched the desperate struggle of the bear to hold on and save himself from going over the precipice.

"I'll give 'im a bullet in his head that'll fix 'im," said Nick, holding his rifle in readiness to fire. "He must hev been on that rock, an' it rolled over with him."

"Yes, that's what did it," remarked Jed.

By and by Nick got a chance to fire, and, did so, the ball grazing Bruin's head so close as to partially stun him.

He released his hold and came tumbling down like a huge black ball, growling and leering savagely at the crags and bushes in his descent.

"Look out!" called Nick.

Down he came, the concussion knocking the breath out of him.

"He's dead," cried one.

"The bullet and the fall together would have killed two bears," said another.

They stood around and looked at what they believed to be the last kicks of the beast. Nick quickly reloaded his rifle, for no one knew how soon another foe might put in an appearance.

"He's a fat fellow," remarked one of the young hunters, stooping and feeling the side of the bear.

The touch seemed to suddenly recall the bear to life again.

He made a sudden move and was on his feet in a twinkling, growling fiercely.

"Look out!"

"He's alive!"

"Take care."

"Let me shoot 'im!"

The party tried to get out of the way of the enraged animal's claws. But they were not entirely successful, for he struck one of them a powerful blow with one of his paws, and knocked him into the river.

Crack! went Jed's rifle, and the black beast went down with an angry growl.

The bullet had gone clean through his heart, and in five minutes he was a dead bear.

"By gum!" exclaimed the young man who had been knocked into the river, "he hit harder than a thunderbolt!" and he rubbed the side of his head ruefully as he stood dripping on the banks of the river.

"Waal, we've got 'im now," said Jed, taking out his knife and proceeding to take off the bear's skin. The others assisted him, and in a very little while both that and the two hams were laid aside. The rest of the carcass was then thrown into the river. It floated away with the current.

"Now, come on," said Nick, taking up one of the hams. "The sooner we git to the cave the better it will be for us."

Jed took up the bearskin, and a young man shouldered the other ham, and all followed the lead of Nick. The hunter followed a narrow defile along the water's edge, and then, after going about fifty yards, turned and began a very hazardous ascent of the mountain—one of those steep heights that abounded in that section of country. They all climbed after him, and when he entered a narrow fissure in the face of the great rock, they were close at his heels.

"This is the cave," said Jed, throwing down the heavy bearskin as he entered a large room just a few feet beyond the outer entrance.

"Hanged if it ain't a good one!" exclaimed one of the young men, looking around him. "There's room enough here for fifty people."

"Yes," said Nick, "and there's a secret passage down to the river, where we can get water without being exposed to danger, were the Indians to hem us up in here."

"Do they know anything about it?" one of them asked.

"I don't think they do. When we build a fire in here to cook our meals the smoke goes out of the top of the mountain a half mile from hyer."

"An' they don't know whar it comes from," chuckled Jed.

The two hunters laid down the bear-hams they were carrying, and proceeded to build a fire out of fagots, a huge pile of which lay in a corner of the large room.

"Jed an' me gathered these fagots last year," remarked Nick, "an' we hev dried venison hid away in hyer to last us three months, ef we ever git crowded by ther redskins."

"Two good men can hold this place agin a thousand reds," said one of the late prisoners, looking around at the natural defenses of the place.

"Of course," assented Nick. "Only one can come in at a

"time, an' two of us can take care of 'em as fast as they come."

Jed started the fire with his tinder-box, and in a few minutes the blaze threw a cheerful light against the rough, ragged stone walls of the cavern, revealing a large room, which communicated with other further back in the bowels of the mountain. In one of these smaller caverns were a number of old rifles and muskets, which Nick and Jed had captured from Indians who did not know how to use them. These were examined, and found nearly all of them fit for use.

While one was broiling the bearsteaks, the others were busy cleaning the rust off the guns, and preparing ammunition for them.

"Cook both hams," said Nick to the man who was broiling the steaks, "for we will need cooked rations on our journey to-morrow."

The evening was spent in drying their clothes and cooking bearsteaks, after which they retired, and slept soundly till the next morning.

CHAPTER XX.

A ONE-SIDED BATTLE.

By sunrise the little party of seven hunters, now all well armed and rested, were ready to set out in search of the young maiden who had been again captured by the Mingoes. Enough bear-steaks had been cooked to last them a week, so they would not be under the necessity of cooking anything to eat during that length of time.

"Come on," said Jed, leading the way out of the cave. "We must all crowd in one canoe till we can git another, or march all the way through the forest."

They followed him down toward the spot where the canoe lay just a few feet from the place where the bear fell the day before. While there, they were startled by a chorus of yells way up on the top of the mountain.

Looking up there they saw a band of at least fifty redskins dancing about in great glee at having discovered the white men. They had seen the smoke ascending through the rocky crevices on the mountain-top, and had been looking all around for the source of it. The odor of the broiling bear steaks had also ascended with the smoke, and it made them hungry mad. But they could not descend the mountain on the river side; nor could it be ascended save up to the entrance of the cave by the little winding path used by the hunters.

These facts were well understood by Nick and Jed, for they had been all over the mountain time and again.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed one of the young hunters, as he looked up at the savages, "they are the same reds who had us prisoners."

"Yes," said Nick. "It's the same band, an' we've got to fight 'em off before we can leave hyer."

"Blast their yaller skins!" growled Jed, his face betraying his anger, "an' the gal is to stay in trouble till we git rid of 'em. It's little marcy they'll git from Jed Hotchkiss, blast 'em!" and with that he raised his rifle, took a deliberate aim, and fired at a redskin who was standing on the brink of the precipice.

The savage gave a whoop, and came tumbling headlong down the craggy mountain-side to the very feet of the whites.

"Look out for arrows!" cried Nick, as he saw the reds adjusting their bows preparatory to returning the shot.

The little party of whites crouched under the shadow of the wall of rock above them, and the shower of arrows passed harmlessly over their heads.

"We must git back to the cave," said Nick. "They'll send a lot of big stones rolling down on us if we stay hyer."

"Yes," added Jed. "Then we may have a chance to kill some more of 'em," and with that he picked up the dead warrior who had fallen from the top of the mountain and threw him into the river.

The current carried the body quickly out of sight.

"He didn't deserve such a burial," said Nick, "but we don't want any such stuff lying round here."

To save the boat, or canoe, from destruction, Nick seized and thrust it under a shelving rock, after which they all reascended the mountainside toward the cave.

Ere they reached it, however, the reds sent a shower of arrows down at them, none of which took effect. The savages yelled like to many demons, thinking the whites were coming up to give them battle.

But when two hours passed, and they saw nothing more of the hunters, the redskins began to grow impatient in their thirst for blood.

They well knew that they could not descend the mountain on the river side, so they resolved to go down the other way and attack them on the river-bank. Accordingly, they moved up in that direction, and crossed the river to take up a position opposite the face of the mountain.

"Let 'em alone," said Nick. "Ef they don't see us they'll come over to hunt for us. Ef they come up hyer among the crags we can kill 'em all."

"By gum!" exclaimed Jed, with a savage eagerness. "Let's kill 'em all. They are worse'n wolves, and hadn't orter live."

The other six hunters agreed with him to try to entrap the whole band and destroy it. He was so enraged over the recapture of pretty Nora Munroe that he was merciless in his hate of the redskins, and was ready to swear a war of extermination against them.

The savages whooped and yelled for several hours, and failed to induce the palefaces to come out of their hiding place. They then concluded that the whites were afraid to face them, and so they had to cross over and go up the face of the mountain in search of them.

As they had canoes on the river they were soon across, and at the very spot where our heroes were in the habit of landing whenever they visited the cave, and then began a cautious, devious climbing of the precipice.

"Wait till they are almost up to the entrance," said Nick, "an' then we can lay out seven at one volley. Then when we reload we can lay out seven more before they can git back to the canoes. They will yell an' charge after the first fire, which is just what we all want 'em to do."

They waited until the head of the band reached a crag in front of the cavern, and then, at a signal from Nick, seven rifles cracked loose, and seven redskins went tumbling back on those behind them.

Wild yells echoed and re-echoed up and down the river, and the enraged redskins, knowing there were only seven white men in the party, made a desperate rush to capture their stronghold by storm.

Just as a dozen had climbed up on the fatal crag, another volley of rifle-shots sent seven more tumbling down on the others below.

"That's fourteen gone!" chuckled Jed, with intense satisfaction.

Trusting in the superiority of numbers, the reds kept climbing up, and making the river and mountain ring with their yells. In another minute or two the crag was covered again, and then another volley sent seven more rattling down among the rocks.

But there were still others on the crag, and they made a rush for the narrow entrance to the cave. But one could

enter at a time, and as fast as they came they were knocked on the head with a rusty old rifle barrel in the hands of sturdy Jed Hotchkiss.

Those behind could not see the terrible slaughter going on in front, and so kept on howling and pushing forward. Jed kept on crushing skulls with the rusty rifle-barrel till the narrow passage was too full to allow any more to pass.

Then those behind began to grow suspicious and held aloof, but still yelled and danced about as if the victory was already theirs.

As no more would dare attempt to enter the cave, the hunters had to open fire on them. A shower of arrows was sent in return, but as the whites could not be seen from without, not one was even hurt, much less killed.

Such a one-sided affair could not last long. The savages had but a dozen or so left out of a band of fifty. They suddenly made the discovery, and then a panic seized them. They changed their yells of defiance to cries of terror and dismay, and made a rush to get away from the fatal spot. But they could not descend with any more speed than they had used in ascending, without incurring the risk of breaking their necks, or half the bones in their bodies.

"Now let them have it!" cried Nick, darting out of the cave, followed by the others.

They opened fire on the retreating, demoralized wretches, till only five redskins were able to reach one of the canoes. Two of those were killed and one wounded ere they could get out of the range of the deadly rifles.

Then the whites waved their coon-skin caps above their heads and made the welkin ring with their shouts of victory.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TALL CHIEF AGAIN.

"By gum!" exclaimed Jed Hotchkiss, almost beside himself with joy over the destruction of the band of redskins, "it's the happiest day of my life. Whoop! Hurrah! hurrah! The mountain is yaller with 'em, but they're dead!"

The hunters shook hands with each other, and congratulated themselves that two or three had escaped to tell the tale, so the whole tribe would hear of the awful destruction inflicted by the whites.

"They will never come about this mountain again," said Nick, as he looked around and down at the dead bodies, of which there were over two score.

"Yes; they won't forget this mountain, or this day's work. I ain't sorry I had to stop an' fight 'em—oh, no!" and he chuckled with as much glee as a child would have done over a new dress or a pair of new boots.

"We must toss 'em into the river," suggested Nick.

"Yes, an' gather up all their arms. Thar's bows, arrows, knives, an' tomahawks enough to arm fifty men. Let's put 'em all away in the cave."

The work of gathering the arms was soon finished, and then the hunters turned their attention to the dead bodies of their late assailants. These they commenced throwing down to the bottom. Some went into the water, and were carried away by the current. Others lay where they fell, and the wounded ones had the life knocked out of them by the fall.

When all were cleared from the front of the cave, the hunters went down and cast them into the water. In ten minutes more not a single redskin, dead or alive, was in sight.

"Now we have ten canoes on hand," said Nick. "We can hide eight of them and use two. A ride of one hundred miles down the river is better than a march through the woods."

The canoes were concealed, and then the hunters concluded

to set out in the other two at sunset, floating with the current, leaving one man in each on guard while the others slept.

By that means they would gain a day's march and be refreshed by a night's rest.

Rowing till near midnight, the others laid down to sleep, while the guards kept the canoes in the middle of the stream.

Sunrise found them floating with the current and with keen appetites for breakfast.

One of the young men was of the opinion that the party which had captured Nora Munroe belonged to Gray Hawk's band, a warlike chief, whose village lay on the right bank of the Muskingum. The whites would have to march overland to that river, after going about one hundred miles down the Allegheny.

The evening of the second day found them at least one hundred miles from their cavern home, where they had so signally defeated the Mingoes. They encamped on the banks of the river, and prepared to start at daylight the next morning.

The march was a long one, and it was not till the evening of the second day of the tramp that they reached the Muskingum River. Then they went into camp to rest and be prepared for any emergency the next day might bring to them. They were within a few miles of Gray Hawk's village, and that fact necessitated the greatest caution.

To avoid attracting the attention of any prowling redskins who might be in the woods, the hunters proceeded to make a supper of the cold bear steaks which they had brought with them.

Just as they were about to commence the meal, they were amazed at seeing the tall form of the mysterious chief who had rescued Nick and Jed from Simon Girty approach them.

The young hunters sprang to their feet and seized their arms.

"Be easy!" called out Nick. "He is our friend."

"Yes," added Jed. "He is a friend in need. He wants his supper," and with that he stuck his knife through a big slice of bear steak, and met the majestic savage half way.

"Glad to see the great chief," said he.

"Ugh!" grunted the chief, giving him a grunt of recognition as he seized the proffered steak, and devoured it with the voracity of a half-famished wolf.

The others stood around and eyed him with no little wonder, as he was entirely unarmed.

The Indian ate three slices of the cold steak and then turned on his heel, and walked away with a grunt of satisfaction.

"What do you let him go away for?" one of the young men asked. "He may tell the Mingoes that we are here, an'—"

"Hold your peace," said Nick. "The Mingoes can't understand a word he says."

"Why, ain't he a Mingo?"

"I don't know. He speaks a tongue which neither reds nor whites understand. The reds are all afraid of him, though he never carries any arms."

"Oh, he's the queer old redskin you told us about when you were at Willard's?"

"Yes—the same. I'll bet the girl is not far away from here."

"Won't he tell where we are?"

"No, I think not."

"It's very strange."

"Very," said Nick.

They talked some time over the appearance of the chief, and then rolled in their blankets to sleep, with two of their number acting as guards.

They were up again by daybreak, and kept well in the thicket to avoid being seen by any of the savages. But when they sat down on the grass to eat their breakfast the tall chief made his appearance and ate with them.

He would not sit down, but stood up and ate as he had done so often before. He gave a few grunts, as if to express his satisfaction with the meal, but did not utter a word that any one of the party could understand.

When he was through eating he turned to leave.

"Ask him if——"

"Ask him nothing," interrupted Nick, glaring at the young hunter who made the suggestion. "He nor we can understand nothing that is said. He is already our friend, an' that is enough for us to know just now."

The chief was soon out of sight in the great wilderness, and they knew they would see nothing more of him till night, when he would come back for his supper.

They moved cautiously up the river in search of the village, and about midday came in sight of it. It was quite a large village, judging from the number of wigwams and children they saw. Of course, they had to keep concealed till the shadows of night would enable them to prosecute their search for the young girl.

Just as the sun was disappearing behind the trees the hunters prepared to eat their supper. The tall chief came forward and ate with them. He seemed to realize that he was both expected and welcomed.

When he went away Jed motioned to his comrades to wait till he returned, and then crept after him with the stealthy tread of a panther.

CHAPTER XXII.

GRAY HAWK'S FATE.

The pioneers waited till Jed was out of sight, and then began to talk about his unexpected movement.

"He'll run into danger," said one.

"He'll lose his scalp," put in another.

"He'll get caught and roasted," added a third.

"Just wait-an' watch, boys," said Nick, after all had spoken. "Jed Hotchkiss knows what he's up to. They won't catch him very easily. He is never caught napping."

"But what can one man do against a hundred warriors?" one of the young pioneers asked.

"A great deal, when the hundred warriors don't know that he is around," Nick replied. "We must hold ourselves in readiness to respond to his signals for help."

"Will he signal for help?"

"Yes, if he needs help."

Then the six men relapsed into a profound silence, and for two or three hours nothing was heard, save an occasional yelp from one of the many curs in the Indian village.

"As long as there is a silence like this," said Nick, in low tones, "we may know that Jed is all right. When he is discovered we will hear yells that will make your hair stand."

Let us now follow Jed, and note his adventures while following the chief through the forest.

The chief led off through the woods in the direction of the village. He never once turned to look behind him to see if he was followed, as he must have heard twigs crack under the hunter's foot at times.

Jed had seen enough of him to know that he could trust him, and did not fear to do so at any time. But when the edge of the village was reached, and he saw the chief boldly advance toward the largest wigwam in it, Jed hesitated. To go forward would be to throw himself on the power of the

tall chief to save him from certain death at the hands of the warriors in the village.

No, he would not do that.

He would wait and take the chances of finding out what he wanted to know without running such a risk as that would be.

The tall savage was soon out of sight, and the hunter was left alone in the clump of bushes on the edge of the clearing in which the village stood. It was a clear starlit night, and he could see many of the wigwams and the forms of warriors, women, and children moving about.

While waiting for something to turn up, he saw a chief in gaudy feathers coming toward him.

"By gum!" thought Jed, as he glared at the savage, "you are coming to a bad place if you only knew it."

The redskin made direct for the very clump of bushes in which Jed was concealed. The hunter could not retreat without running the risk of making his presence known. To do that would alarm the village, and render it impossible to aid the fair Nora if she were really in the village at all. Standing where he was, he drew his keen-edged hunting-knife, and prepared to cut down the redskin if he came within arm's-length of him.

The redskin did come up almost against him, and the next moment he felt a sharp pain under his chin. He tried to yell, but it ended in a gurgling sound and groan. Then he sank down on the ground, and in two or three minutes was the dearest redskin ever seen in that village.

"Now I will see if I can't make myself look like a redskin just once in my life," muttered Jed, as he stooped down and removed the fantastic head-dress of the dead chief. Then he took the blanket and threw it over his shoulder in the manner worn by the reds. The head-dress was adjusted to his own head.

"They can't see my face in the dark," he muttered, "an' I can talk Mingo as well as the best of 'em. I will keep out of the light and go round by all the wigwams and look for the gal. Ef she is hyer I'll go and tell Nick."

Having completed his make-up, Jed marched boldly toward the wigwams, passing several warriors, who did not seem to take any particular notice of him. One of the many curs came up and began smelling around him in a suspicious manner. He avoided exposure by raising his foot and kicking the cur out of his way. The dog gave a few yelps and kept out of his way.

Strolling on down through the village, he peered into a number, where he could do so without exciting suspicion. He saw no signs of any white captives in any of them. Just as he was about to give up in despair he heard someone crying in one of the wigwams.

It was the voice of a woman, and so he turned to see what it meant. He knew that Indian maidens seldom indulged in tears, and when they did so they sought a secret place.

On reaching the wigwam he heard a warrior's voice.

"The paleface maiden will not be unhappy when she is Gray Hawk's wife. She will be the wife of the chief of the village, and——"

"I will never be the wife of an Indian! I will die first."

"By gum!" ejaculated Jed, in an undertone, as he recognized the tones of Nora Munroe. "Thar she is, an' the pesky skunk is making love to her. Great b'ars! how can I keep my hands off him!"

Jed peered through a small crevice in the wigwam and discovered that no one else was in there with them. The wily chief had sent the old crones away in order that he might woo her alone.

Jed understood the situation at a single glance, and knew that none of the reds dared go near that wigwam till Gray

Hawk gave the signal for the old crones to return and take charge of the fair captive.

"Ah, my fine buck!" exclaimed Jed, "I'll drop in and see about that wooing myself."

He walked boldly around to the entrance of the wigwam and entered.

With an angry scowl on his face, Gray Hawk rose to his feet, tomahawk in hand, and confronted the intruder.

Jed did not give him time to utter a yell, which he well knew he would do the moment he recognized him. He sprang forward and swept his keen-bladed knife under his chin. The jugular was severed, and the chief sank down on the bearskin right at the feet of the fair captive.

Nora was almost paralyzed by the suddenness of the thing. She did not utter a word, but gazed at the dying chief as if the sight had a peculiar fascination which she was not able to resist.

"Nora?" said Jed, in low tones.

She started as if stung, and glared at him.

She had taken him for another Indian, and cared not to take any notice of him.

But that voice!

She pushed her hair back, and glared at him with wild, staring eyes.

"I am Jed Hotchkiss," he said. "Don't make any noise."

She sank down on her knees by the side of the dead chief, clasped her hands above her head, and murmured:

"Oh, God! Thou hast heard my prayer! I am saved, and by him!"

"Don't make any noise," he cautioned again, "or my presence here may be discovered. We are safe enough now."

"Yes; for I will die rather than fall into their hands again," and she picked up the scalping-knife that had fallen from the hand of Gray Hawk. "I will defend myself to the last, and die by my own hand rather than be captured again!"

"There will be no need of that. Our friends are out in the woods waiting for us. We are seven in number. Come, we must go out and join them. You must follow close behind me, as if I were a chief."

"Yes, I will gladly follow you anywhere in the wide world," and she prepared to go forth in the darkness with him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS.

Nora had the utmost faith in the man before her, and would have followed him to the uttermost parts of the earth had he bid her to do so. She had been expecting him to come to her rescue, as she knew he would hear of her capture sooner or later. In her heart she indulged the hope that he loved her, and that he would do all in his power to save her from the savages.

"Are you ready to go now?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied.

"Come on, then. Don't fear anything."

"I will fear nothing when you are near," she said.

He stepped out of the wigwam and gazed around to see if any warriors were in sight.

To his surprise he saw the tall form of the chief who had led him to the village, standing a few paces distant, with his arms folded across his breast, and gazing intently at him.

"He surely does not know me in this disguise," thought the brave hunter, "and may try to intercept me. If he does I shall have to cut his wind-pipe. She must not be stopped now."

Jed kept his eye on the tall chief, and stalked away toward the woods, Nora following close at his heels.

Just as they gained the edge of the woods Nora caught his arm and whispered:

"We are followed!"

"Come on," he returned in a low tone of voice.

She went on, and did not look behind again till he halted and looked back himself.

Then he saw a crouching figure following them, and instinctively knew that a prowling redskin was following them under the impression that he was an Indian chief leading the captive to the solitude of the forest.

Quick as a flash Jed bounded forward. The savage, taken completely by surprise, straightened himself up and tried to get away. But it was too late. The long, keen-bladed hunting-knife of the hunter entered his heart, and the savage threw up both hands, grasped at the air, and then sank down to the ground in the quivering agonies of death.

Jed turned quietly away, and took Nora's hand in his.

"Are you hurt?" she trembling asked.

"No; not a bit," he replied.

"I am so glad," and she clung to his arm as if she regarded him as her only friend in the world.

"So am I," he dryly remarked. "It ain't pleasant to git hurt by the pesky varmints."

"No," and she relapsed into silence again.

Presently the hunter stopped and made a signal, imitating the owl so neatly that Nora was startled, thinking one of those night-birds was near to her.

In a moment or two she heard another signal farther in the woods, and then Jed started forward. The signals were repeated as they advanced, till the hunter stopped and said:

"Nick!"

"Jed!" responded Nick, and the next moment the two hunters grasped each other's hands.

"I've got her, Nick," she heard Jed say to the other.

"By gum!" responded Nick, feeling around in the dark; "what is she? Give me your hand, gal."

Nora reached out her hand and touched him.

He grasped her hand and said, in low tones:

"We would have died to save you, Nora."

"Oh, I thank God for such friends!" she murmured, her voice choking with emotion.

"Nick," whispered Jed to his comrade, "we must take all the canoes, as many as we can, an' go down the river till daylight, and then go over to t'other river."

"Yes, that's the way, but we don't want but two."

"Waal, go an' git 'em—no, we all go together."

Nick signaled to the other pioneers, and then they started toward the river, which ran by the south side of the village. Nick led the way, and Jed turned and took Nora up in his arms as if she were but a mere child of five instead of nineteen years, and carried her along. She made no protest, but put an arm around his brawny neck and kissed him.

That kiss went direct to his heart. It paid him a thousand times for all his trouble. He pressed her to his heart and returned the kiss with compound interest. Oh, how light her heart was after that kiss! She would go through a thousand captivities to experience the bliss of that moment again, for it told her that the brave, rugged pioneer who held her so tightly to his heart loved her as she wanted to be loved. In her heart she even thanked the redskins for having captured her, and thus brought the man she loved to her side again.

In a little while they reached the canoes. Nick selected two of the largest and best, and then turned all the others adrift. The little party entered the two and started down the

river, rowing lightly till they were a mile below. Then they bent themselves to the paddles, and sent the canoes flying through the water.

It was near midnight when they started, and not a moment was lost from that time till daylight.

"They will not disturb Gray Hawk," said Jed, "till they find the dead Injun in the bushes, an' then they may suspect something an' call 'im out. Mighty glad I found 'im in thar."

When daylight came the party landed, turned the canoes adrift, and started out through the woods.

"They won't find this trail," said Nick, "though some other hunting party may run over it. But we hev got a start, an' they can't catch up afore we git to Willard's."

When about a mile from the river, where the light of a fire could not be seen, the hunters shot a deer, and had the first meal of warm, freshly-cooked meat since starting out on the trip.

The meal over, they started forward again. Jed and Nora remained together during the whole day, as happy as two young children. The others seemed to know that they were lovers, and therefore left them alone together as much as they could.

The day passed, and night found them tired and hungry about half way between the two rivers. Nora was very tired and footsore. The hunters built a shelter of green boughs for her to rest under, and gathered leaves till her bed was as downy as one of feathers.

The guards were vigilant all through the night. To the surprise of both Nick and Jed, the tall chief did not put in his appearance at meal-time. They did not know what to think of it.

The next morning the little party resumed the journey toward the river, up which they intended to go till within a half day's march of Willard's.

At first, Nora was too sore to walk. But when Jed volunteered to carry her in his arms, she made a desperate effort, and was soon able to walk. In a little while the soreness and stiffness from the long march of the day before wore off, and the party moved on at their usual pace.

Night found them on the bank of the river. Two canoes, that had been concealed, were brought out and held in readiness to start at daylight the next morning.

Just as the stars were fading away, the little party entered the canoes and started up the river.

At noon they left the river and proceeded to march across to the settlement, which stood on the left bank of the Muskingum.

Just as the sun was sinking they reached the station, and were received with demonstrations of joy by all the inhabitants of the settlement.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LITTLE PIONEER LOVE-MAKING.

Such rejoicing as took place when the little party returned!

The people of the settlement were in the depths of despair, for they did not know that Nick and Jed had gone in search of Nora. As for the five men whom Nick and Jed had saved from the stake, they had never expected to see them again.

Such happy hearts as assembled around the aged chaplain that night, to hear him return thanks to the Giver of All Good for the return of the captives!

Old Ben Willard grasped Nick and Jed's hands, and said:

"We cannot express our thanks for what you have done; neither can we let you go away from us again. We intend to hold you by every tie we can, if you will not stay willingly."

"We will stay when we have carried our pelts to the trading-post once more," said Nick, after a long pause, "eh, Jed? Shall we move down hyar to take care of the settlement?"

"Yes," said Jed, and Nora Munroe's face lighted up with a glow, and there beamed a glad, happy light in her eyes. She could not conceal her joy, and so, with the modest confusion of the young maiden, sprang up and ran away to hide her blushes.

Her Aunt Sarah, who had engaged herself to Ben Murchison, ran after her, and said, when they were alone together:

"Oh, Nora, dear, I know your secret! You love Jed Hotchkiss! He is a noble, brave man, and worthy of any woman's love."

Nora hid her face in her aunt's bosom and made no reply.

"You need not be ashamed of your love, dear," said Sarah. "I, too, love, and have promised Ben Murchison to be his wife as soon as his cabin is finished, which will be in two weeks. Has he said anything to you yet?"

"Yes," murmured the happy maiden, burying her crimson face in the bosom more closely than ever.

"What did he say? Tell me, dear, did he say he loved you?"

"He kissed me."

"But what did he say?"

"He kissed me, and his heart said to my heart 'I love you,' and that is all, Aunt Sarah."

"That is not a declaration, my dear. Did he ask you to be his wife?"

"He kissed me, and that was everything," she repeated. "Oh, he loves me—he loves me!"

"Nora, dear, that is not enough. Your mother ought to know this."

"Not a word, Aunt Sarah. Wait, and let me tell her. Don't you say anything. Oh, he loves me, and I am happy."

Mrs. Munroe was wise enough to read her daughter's happiness in her eyes and fresh, young face, but said nothing to her about it. She was happy at the thought of having such a man as a son-in-law, though he was twice the age of her daughter.

The next day, when all were rested from the fatigue of the long journey, the young hunters told the story of their adventures, and gave Nick and Jed the full credit of their rescue from over fifty redskins, and the total destruction of the band two days later with the exception of two or three warriors.

Their stories made them more than ever the heroes of the border, and it was not surprising that the settlers at Willard's wanted them to live in their midst.

Two days later Nick and Jed told old Ben Willard that they would leave the next morning to return to their traps, which they would move back to the Muskingum in the fall.

When they went to shake hands with all the men, women, and children in the settlement, they found nearly every one in tears. Nora looked shyly up in Jed's face, and asked:

"Will you come back to us?"

"Yes—I'll come back to you, ef you want me," he stammered.

"I—I do want you to," she answered in low, sweet tones.

"Then I will come back, an'—an'—Nora?"

"What, Jed?"

It was the first time she had ever called him Jed.

"Will—you—marry me ef I come back?"

He had asked the question that had been sticking in his throat, and was as pale as a sheet.

"Yes, Jed, if you want me to," she replied.

"I do want you to—I love you—an'—an'—I can't help it!" and so he snatched her up in his brawny arms and covered her face with burning kisses.

"I love you, too, you dear old man!" she replied, returning his kisses with two-fold interest.

"By gum!" exclaimed the hunter, "I'm in more luck than any man ever was, and I'm happy to cry about it," and he danced about the little cabin. The girl he had twice saved from the Indians clasped to his heart.

She disengaged herself from his arms, at last, however, and said to him:

"You will not be gone long."

"No—be back soon," was the reply.

"I say, Jed!" cried old Ben, "we'll have a cabin ready for Nora an' you when you come back, eh—boys?"

"Yes, yes!" cried two score of voices at a breath.

"Thar! Come back in time to give us a double wedding, old fellow!" and he slapped Jed on the back in a jolly, familiar way. Nora blushed like a rose, and was too happy to say anything about it. She was to be married sooner than she expected, and at the same time her Aunt Sarah was.

Nick and Jed finally took their departure and entered the great wilderness to the east of the little settlement.

Two days later they reached the Alleghany River, and began an inspection of their numerous traps, which they found full of game. That night they went up to their old rendezvous in the cave under the mountain, where they had given the Mingoes such a terrible thrashing, to spend the time in sleeping in security.

They found everything just as they had left it, and laid down to sleep. Such a good sleep they had not had in weeks, and it was no wonder that it was high noon the next day ere they arose from their blankets.

"By gum!" exclaimed Jed, "I haven't had such a good sleep in a month."

"Nor I," said Nick. "I am ten years younger this morning," and he arose and walked about the cave for several minutes.

Jed did likewise, and then went out to take a look over the river, which lay at the foot of the mountain, some two hundred feet below the cave, like a sheet of molten silver. He did not go but a few feet beyond the narrow entrance to the cave ere he sprang back as if stung by a hornet.

"What's the matter?" Nick asked.

Jed motioned him to come forward and be silent.

Nick ran to his side.

Jed pointed to the crag in front of the entrance to the cave.

Nick looked, and was amazed at seeing a dozen stalwart savages sitting on it.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CRAGS.

The redskins were like so many statues as they sat there on the crag gazing out over the broad panorama that lay outstretched before them. They seemed to be lost in deep reverie—half dreaming, as it were, and sat as silent as so many stumps.

Yet they had their weapons by them. Their bows, arrows, and tomahawks were where they could be caught up and utilized at a moment's notice.

"What are they waitin' for, Nick?" Jed asked in a whisper, as he gazed at the savage statues.

"Hanged if I know," replied Nick. "But thar'll be music when they find us out, I reckon."

"Maybe they don't know whar this cave is, an' will go away soon."

"Ef they don't leave soon some of 'em will go to the Happy Hunting-ground," remarked Nick, "for I am not going to be cooped up in hyer by any Injuns."

"That's me," Jed replied.

Thy waited two hours, and during that time not an Indian moved. Silent as statues they sat there, gazing out over the river that rolled by the base of the mountain like a stream of molten silver.

"I hate to shoot an Injun in cold blood," remarked Nick.

"So do I," assented Jed.

"Let's yell at 'em an' tell 'em to leave hyer," suggested Nick. "Then they'll jump up with a yell an' go to shootin' at us."

"Yes, that's so."

"Then I'll yell at 'em," said Nick.

"Go ahead."

"Hyar, you redskins, you just git out of—Oh, Lord—look! Whar are they?"

The two hunters were pale with terror.

The moment Nick's voice broke the stillness of the scene every Indian instantly vanished into thin air, and without a word, or action, or any noise whatsoever.

Nick and Jed gazed at each other in dumfounded amazement.

"Great b'ars!" gasped Jed, his face the picture of puzzled interest. "What does it mean, anyhow?"

"Hanged if I know," returned Nick. "They looked like real live redskins."

"So they did. But they must have been ghosts."

"Yes. Never heard of an Injun ghost before, though."

"Nor did I. But maybe they have souls like other people."

"Don't believe an Injun has any more soul than a hornet has," and Nick shook his head in a very determined manner.

"Ef they wasn't ghosts, what were they, then?" Jed asked.

"Don't know. Never saw such a thing before."

"Let's go out thar an' see if we can find any trail."

They both went out to the crag, holding their rifles cocked, so as to be ready for any sudden emergency.

But on the crag, which was solid rock, they could find no trail, nor anything that showed that anything in the shape of man or beast had recently been there. Just over the edge of the crag was a precipice of over two hundred feet. To have gone over that would have been sure death to any Indian. But a careful search failed to show the mangled remains of anything below.

"Waal," exclaimed Nick, turning toward Jed, "this beats anything I ever saw in my life."

"Yes, they was dead Injuns, Nick," replied Jed, looking his comrade full in the face.

"I believe they was. They must have been some we shot here two weeks ago."

The two hunters went into the cave again to see if everything was in safe concealment. They made sure that nothing would be disturbed, even though the place should be found and entered, after which they proceeded to go down the mountain side to the river.

They entered a canoe, and rowed up the river several miles to where they had traps, and found that game was plentiful. The traps were full, and for the rest of the day they were kept busy attending to them.

The next few days and nights were passed in attending to the traps and securing pelts. They were having good luck when they heard Indians in the forest engaged in the chase.

The redskins had come suddenly on a bear and her cub. The mother bear at once showed fight, and, when wounded by an arrow, charged furiously on her assailants, and tore one to pieces, after crushing him in her powerful arms.

The wild shouting of the reds as they surrounded the game, and shot her full of arrows, warned our heroes of their danger. They at once abandoned their traps, and took to the

canoe. Their means of escape depended on their having a half hour's start of their enemies.

But ere they reached the other bank of the river they heard a yell from half a hundred throats, which plainly told them their presence had been discovered.

"They have seen us," said Nick.

"Yes. We may as well pull for the cave," answered Jed.

"They can reach us with their arrows," said Nick, as several arrows whizzed past the little canoe.

"Then we must cut through the woods, and take the canoe with us," suggested Jed.

"By gum! They are swimming across after us!"

Sure enough!

Seeing two white hunters trying to get away from them, a dozen redskins sprang into the water, and commenced swimming for the opposite bank.

Nick and Jed got behind a couple of trees and fired at two of the tufted heads.

They were men who seldom missed their aim. The bullets crashed through the redskins' heads, and the victims sank out of sight, to rise no more.

The two rifle-shots woke up the echoes of the forest, and ere they died away, half a hundred redskins responded with demoniacal yells. Then a shower of arrows came. But they fell wide of the mark, and our heroes remained unharmed behind their trees.

They lost no time, however, in reloading their rifles and giving the reds another shot.

Two more went down under their deadly aim, and then another howl went up from those in the woods on the other side. A shower of arrows came, several of which struck the trees behind which the two hunters were sheltered.

Crack!

Crack!

Two more savages went down, and six more were now pretty well over the stream.

"Load quick, Jed!" cried Nick.

Jed rammed a ball home in double-quick time.

"Now for two more!"

Crack!

Crack!

"That leaves four!" cried Nick. "We can take two with the pistols an' club the other two."

The four reds were within ten feet of the river-bank.

The two hunters rushed out and gave two of the reds a bullet each, and then waited for the other two to land.

But when the two warriors saw that they were the only ones left of the swimmers, they hesitated about landing.

"Come on, you pesky varmints!" cried Nick, flourishing his rifle as a club.

"Ugh!" grunted one of the reds. "Paleface heap shoot. In-jun go back."

"No, you won't! We'll shoot you as you swim!"

"Ugh! Me go!"

Both dived and swam nearly fifty feet under the water.

Nick and Jed stepped back out of the way of the arrows, and quickly reloaded their rifles.

Then they waited for another shot, and soon got it. The last of the swimmers went down in the current, and were seen no more.

aim of the two white hunters, made the welkin ring with their yells.

"Thar's a big crowd of 'em," remarked Nick, as he listened to their yells.

"Yes," returned Jed, "and they git over hyer they'll make it hot for us."

"So they will. We must get back to our cave as quick as we can."

"But how can we with the canoe?"

"We must take it on our shoulders," answered Nick.

"We can do that."

"Yes; let's make a dash and drag it out of the water."

They made a sudden dash down to the water's edge, seized the birch canoe and drew it out of the water ere the reds on the other side could adjust their arrows. By the time the arrows came they had the canoe out of sight in the bushes.

Then they took it on their shoulders and made their way down the river as fast as they could.

The Indians understood at once that they took the canoe for the purpose of putting it in the river at some other point. So, when an hour passed and they saw nothing more of them, they sent over several warriors to find the trail, and let them know which way they went.

The warriors found the trail, and yelled back across the river for the rest of the band to go downstream. Then the pursuit commenced on both sides of the river.

But the two hunters had an hour's start, and lost no time on the way. When they had gone about four miles they put the canoe in the water, and pushed out in the stream.

A yell a mile or so up the river told that they had been seen.

"We must pull for it now, Nick," Jed cried, bending to the task of rowing. Nick pulled with all his might, and, in a little while, they landed at the foot of the mountain, sunk the canoe, and then made their way up to the cave.

The savages saw where they landed, and made their way round to the point, but were puzzled to know what became of the canoe. Their first impression was that the white hunters had carried the canoe up the mountain with them. Yet they could see no water-drops on the stones. Then they concluded that it had been sunk somewhere in the river.

At last they followed the little trail up the rugged mountain-side, till they reached the crag where the white hunters had seen the mysterious party of Indians a few mornings before. There they halted, and looked around. They had never been there before. But they had heard of the awful destruction of a big band of their warriors at that very place, and were more or less awed by the unpleasant fact.

Suddenly two whip-like cracks were heard behind them, and two of their bravest warriors tumbled over the crag, and went down, bounding from crag to crag till they lodged on the rocks at the water's edge.

Being back in the cave, the smoke of the two rifles was not seen by the savages. So they did not know whence came the shots that had been so fatal to two of their number. The crevice in the rocks, which led into the cave, seemed to run in every direction. Then the sounds of the shots in the cave caused them to think they were much farther off than they were.

They were looking in every direction for the unseen foe, when two more shots sent two other warriors to their doom.

Then a wild yell burst from them.

They had seen the flash of the rifles, and made a rush for the narrow entrance to the cave.

So narrow was the entrance that but one could enter at a time. It was an easy matter to knock them on the head one at a time, and the two hunters knew just how to do such work.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RETREAT TO THE CAVE.

When the savages on the further side of the river saw that all the twelve swimmers had gone down under the unerring

In a few minutes the lit passage was choked up with dead Indians. The other story, and remembered the terrible stories they had heard all the awful destruction that had once overtaken their warriors on that mountain. Even while they were trying to gather their wits about them, two more shots from within sent more warriors bounding down among the crags to a horrible death.

That was the climax.

They uttered yells of dismay and went plunging down the precipice any way they could, down without breaking their necks.

"Thar they go!" cried Nick, running out on the crag and giving them another shot. Jed did likewise, and then both stood there, and saw the remnant of the band swim the river to the further bank.

"Maybe they will get sick of this mountain after awhile," said Nick, as he saw the warriors stop on the river-bank and gaze up at the mountain crags.

"Yes; but ef they ain't sick now, they can come back an' git another dose," put in Jed.

But Nick was right.

The Mingoës never afterward dared pursue any white man who took refuge in that mountain. The two disastrous defeats they had sustained there made them regard that place as peculiarly fatal to their tribe.

But Nick and Jed never found out their superstition in regard to the mountain until many years after, when they heard it from the lips of an old Mingo chief. Thinking that the whole tribe would take a notion to come and surround the mountain, and thus start a siege that would ultimately end in disaster, they concluded to sell all their pelts and make for Willard's Settlement.

Accordingly they packed up all their pelts and made for the nearest trading post.

Three days later they were at the trading-post where the famous duel took place between them and three Indians who had once tried to burn them at the stake. No time was lost in disposing of their pelts, and then they prepared to return to their mountain fastness for the purpose of breaking up and going down the river in canoes.

They met several Mingoës at the trading-post, whom they were suspicious of. They glared at each other as if they wanted to engage in a trial of strength, backed up by hate.

The Mingoës hated the two whites more than all the rest of the race. They had received more defeats at their hands than from any other palefaces in the country; hence their intense hatred of them.

Nick and Jed were warned to beware of the Mingoës then at the post, and at the same time were forbidden to do or say anything to promote a collision. There were more reds than whites there at the time, which fact caused the savages to be quite aggressive in their conduct.

One Mingo warrior was particularly insulting in his manners, and Jed ridiculed him by a regular horse laugh as he strutted by.

"Ugh!" grunted the chief. "White hunter laughs like a heap big fool!"

"Of course," replied Jed. "When I laugh at a fool I laugh like one."

"Ugh!" grunted the Mingo. "Cowards laugh an' talk. Warriors fight an' take scalps."

"Did you ever scalp anything bigger'n a muskrat, old yaller-belly?" queried Jed.

"Ugh! me great chief; take heap scalps," replied the savage.

"Where are they?"

"In wigwam."

"Oh! Wigwam full, eh?"

The bantering tone irritated the red beyond endurance. He

drew his tomahawk and made at the hunter. Jed raised his left hand and caught the descending arm. Then, with his right, he gave him a punch on his nose that flattened it all over his face.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

The savage went down like a log, and saw more stars than he had ever dreamed of. The other warriors, excited though they were, refrained from interfering as long as the whites did the same thing.

Nick waited for the redskin to get up and face him again, which he soon did.

The redskin could never understand the science of sparring, hence they could never stand before the white man who had any knowledge of the art whatever.

It was the case in this instance.

The savage came at him with his scalping-knife, and was sent to grass again so quickly that he hardly knew what did it.

But he was game.

He came up time and again, only to get laid out, until both eyes were closed so he could not see. Even then he tried to feel around for the hunter.

The true character of the Indian was then displayed. His own comrades taunted him with his defeat, and declared him no better than a papoose or a squaw, and went away and left him to find his way home as best he could in his bruised and battered condition.

"Now you had better get away from here as soon as possible," said the post-agent to Nick, "as some of the reds will try to murder you ere another sunrise."

"Oh, they have been trying to do that these ten years," replied Nick, "but they haven't done it yet."

The two hunters decided to leave that night, however, and, as it was a moonlit night, they could see well enough to travel. At the same time it was too dark to see or follow a trail.

Two days later they were back again at the cave in the mountain, resting from the long tramp.

Two days of rest was all they wanted, and then they prepared to move down the river with such things as they wished to carry with them.

Going down to the river's edge, they drew out two canoes from their places of concealment, and began loading them up with things, such as extra bear-skins, many savage weapons which had been picked up after the two disastrous defeats of the Mingoës, and a few other articles.

When everything was in readiness for the start, they again concealed the canoes, and went up to the cave to wait for the going down of the sun.

As soon as the darkness came on, our heroes went down to the canoes, and pushed out into the stream. Looking back up toward the top of the mountain, they were amazed at seeing a group of silent warriors standing there, outlined against the silvery disc of the moon.

The two hunters gazed at the spectacle in awe-stricken silence.

They knew that at certain times that group of dusky ghosts would appear on that mountain for all time. To this day they are said to appear there and gaze out over the river, as if looking for the remnants of their once powerful tribe.

Nick and Jed pulled away with all their might, and, the current being with them, made many miles ere midnight came. But midnight passed, they had no fear of meeting any

other canoes on the way, and daylight found them at least one hundred miles on their way.

Stopping at a secure place, they slept through the day, and resumed their journey through the night. Their intention was to go down the river into the Ohio, and follow that stream till they reached the mouth of the Muskingum, up which they would row till they would reach their place of destination.

A week later they reached Willard's Settlement, and were received with open arms.

Pretty Nora Munroe was the happiest maiden in the world at the return of her hero-lover, and Jed was no less happy than she. He gave her bear-skins, and other useful articles, to furnish the cabin which the settlers had built for them.

Preparations for the double marriage were made. Nora and her Aunt Sarah were to be wedded at the same time, and two happier women were never seen.

The marriages took place in due time, and each couple settled down to the full enjoyment of wedded bliss. A year later and Nick led Mrs. Munroe, Nora's mother, to the altar. Both Sarah and Nora were then mothers of bouncing boy-babies.

Some time after these events a treaty of peace was made with the Mingoes. Then the little settlement grew rapidly in population and prosperity. Our heroes had many visits from the Mingo chiefs, who respected them for their courage and

prowess as hunters and fighters. From them they learned that the mysterious tall chief, whose strange conduct had so often puzzled them, was regarded by the tribe as one whom the Great Spirit had touched. He muttered continually in a strange tongue, and left the people to itself. He was finally lost, and never seen again.

Some of the best families in the valley of the Ohio now trace their descent from our heroes, and they never tire of boasting of the fact.

THE END.

Read "RED LIGHT DICK, THE ENGINEER PRINCE; OR, THE BRAVEST BOY ON THE RAILROAD," by Jas. C. Merritt, which will be the next number (314) of "Pluck and Luck."

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